

NUGGETS IN THE DEVIL'S PUNCH BOWL

LANKY TIM

LOST IN THE BUSH

THUNDER- AND - LIGHTNING

BY ANDREW ROBERTSON



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THE KIDNAPPED SQUATTER

And Other Australian Tales

BY

ANDREW ROBERTSON



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BY
ANDREW ROBERTSON
AUTHOR OF "THE KIDNAPPED SQUATTER," ETC.

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Robert Browne
(Author)
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NUGGETS IN THE DEVIL'S
PUNCH BOWL

CHAPTER I

BILL MARLOCK had been shearing all the morning, with long slashing cuts before which the fleece fell, fold upon fold. He was the “ringer” of the shed, and his reputation was at stake, for Norman Campbell was running him close. To-day was Saturday, and it was known from the tally that Bill was only one sheep ahead, and that Norman was making every effort to finish the week “one better” than the record shearer of Yantala woolshed. The two men were working side by side, and eyeing each other from time to time with furtive glances. Norman suddenly straightened himself, and, quick as a frightened snake, thrust his long body across the “board,” with the sheep he had shorn in his sinewy hands, and shot it into the tally pen among the white, shivering sheep. Then he

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dashed into the catching pen, and seized the smaller of two sheep that remained. At almost the same moment Bill had his hands upon the same sheep, but took them off when he saw the other man was before him, and was obliged to content himself, much to his chagrin, with the "cobbler," a grizzled, wiry-haired old patriarch that every one had shunned.

When Bill carried out this sheep there was a loud roar from all the shearers who caught from that pen, followed by derisive laughter.

"Who shaved the cobbler?" was shouted from one end of the shed to the other.

When almost every man had slashed and stabbed Bill with these cutting words, a whisper ran round the "board" that Norman had beaten Bill in his tally, and that the beaten man was groaning over his defeat and climbing down from the position of the fastest shearer in the shed.

Bill did not like this: that was clear. He had known all the morning that his pride of place was slipping from him, for his wrist ached and was giving way under the strain. He finished shearing the "cobbler" when the manager shouted

“Smoko!” Then Bill slid down on the slippery floor without a word, and laid his head upon his outstretched arm.

The sun was hot. Everything was frizzling, frying, or baking. The stunted white-gums drooped and yawned; the grass hung limp; the tall thistles bowed their heads and shut their eyes; the lizards were as quiet as the granite boulders on which they lay; the crows sat motionless on the fences; and the clouds were too lazy to move.

“Ee takes es gruel without choking, an’ doesn’t find no bones in’t,” said Jack Jewell, with a jerk of his left thumb towards Bill.

“Ol’ Bill’s panned out. Ef ee isn’t ringer ’is porridge ’as no salt in’t,” said Tom Wren.

“He! he!” giggled a weak little man; “it’s like ridin’ in a kerridge, an’ comin’ down to hobblin’ on yer own trotters.”

Peter Amos, a greybeard, shook his head solemnly as he buried his nose in a pannikin of tea, and said, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall—that’s gospel wisdom; an’ don’t ‘it a man wen’s down—that’s

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worldly wisdom, an' looks like as it 'ad jumped out o' the Bible stark naked."

"Mair like the man i' the parable, Peter," said Sandy McKerrow, "wha took the highest room wi' a swagger, an' had to climb down to the lowest room wi' his tail 'tween his legs."

"Aye, man, that's verra true, verra true," said another known as "Scottie."

Here a stalwart giant, with a shock of red hair, stood up, with doubled fists, and spat on the floor ; then said, "If any of you mongrel mules says another word against Bill, I'll rattle your teeth down your throat like dice in a box."

Meanwhile the subject of this conversation had closed his eyes, and was fast asleep. All his senses were locked, bolted, and barred. Sheep, shears, tallies, and pride of place were forgotten. He was in the land of dreams, that ancient land of gold, precious stones, ivory castles, battle, murder, and sudden death.

Silence reigned in the shed. The men quietly ladled the tea out of the buckets into their pannikins, or struck a match on the seat of their trousers, lit their pipes, and smoked.

Bill slept on, but suddenly his brow was knitted and his hands were clenched. Then he opened his eyes, and looked round with a scared face.

"Boys," he said, "I've had a dream! I'll never shear another sheep!"

He slowly rose and stood up, then he took his oilstone, and with it smashed his shears into fragments.

"Good-bye all," he said; then slid into the count-out pen, vaulted two fences, got his saddle and swag. When he caught his horse, he saddled up, mounted, and rode away across the ranges.

"There's a roaring fire in that volcano," said Peter Amos, keeping the words well between his teeth, for fear of the giant with the shock of red hair.

CHAPTER II

WHETHER the dream or the hand of fate gave him his course I know not, but Bill rode a straight line, up hill and down dale. When he came to a fence or a log he made his horse jump it. There was no going round or turning back, till he found himself descending a steep, rugged spot, known as the Devil's Punch Bowl.

"This is the place I saw in my dream," he said aloud ; "but where is the dead man ?"

A little stream wound in and out among the rocks. The hum of bees and the smell of honey filled the air. Wattles waved their yellow tassels, and reflected splashes of gold on the water. Wild mint, fennel, and chamomile dipped their feet in the water, and wove two ribbons of green on

the margin of the brook, as far as the eye could measure them.

He came to a little track which his bush experience taught him was made by man. He followed it to the water's edge. Here it had a grim ending. A bucket and an old pannikin stood on a stone; a fresh footmark was printed, sharp and clear, on a patch of damp earth; and the body of a man, motionless, asleep or dead, was half hidden among the herbage, growing lush and tall, as if trying to screen it with loving hands.

Bill jumped off his horse, and gently turned the man over on his back and looked at him. One glance was enough. Two eyes, wide open, and horrible to behold, met his gaze. A faint smile seemed to linger about the mouth. The face appeared to be chiselled marble. It was easy to see that Death had aimed true, and that his dart had struck home.

Bill, nevertheless, instinctively put his finger on the dead man's pulse, and placed his hand over the heart. They were both still as a rundown clock, and stopped for ever.

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A letter had fallen from the man's pocket when he was being turned over. Bill took it up in the hope that it would disclose something. The writing was in a woman's hand, full of affection, repetition, and platitude. It wound up with, "Your loving daughter, Mary." There was a date on the top, but no address. There was an envelope, and the postmark was Melbourne.

"Not much clue," said Bill ; "nameless, so far." The man, evidently, by the clay smears on his trousers, and by the general appearance of his clothes, was a digger.

"I saw a tent in my dream, so I'll look for it," said Bill.

He went along the little track for a hundred yards, and there, behind some stunted bushes, stood a weather-stained, ragged tent. Everything about it was squalid, unkempt, unwashed, and unlovely. The only bit of sentiment, or romance if you will, was a photograph of a girl, pinned to the tent, at the head of the bed. There was a pathetic look about the eyes which seemed to follow him wherever he turned. They haunted him, and illumined the tent. After a short time

he went up to the portrait, and stared at it for five minutes, studying every feature.

"I suppose you are Mary," he said ; "I feel we are to meet some day, and you are to come into my life."

Below the photograph, and also pinned to the canvas, was a rude diagram. At one end of a line was a triangle ; at the other end a curious tree with two branches touching the ground. Between the triangle and the tree was a big dot, and at the dot were two figures, but whether 45 or 65 he could not tell. An arrow pointed to them.

He kissed the photograph, unpinned it carefully, and put it in his pocket.

Then he took down the diagram and examined it more carefully. There was an almost undecipherable scrawl at the bottom, which he made out to be, "For Mary." He put the diagram in his purse.

"This morning," he whispered, "I thought I was tied to shearing for life ; now I am harnessed, in some mysterious way, to a romance. This dead man clutches me like the Old Man of the Mountain. He has me in his grip ; and this Mary moves me strangely. Shall we ever meet ? "

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He mounted his horse, and cantered down the valley till he came to the main road, where he stood uncertain where to turn. At first he thought of going to the nearest township, twelve miles to the east, to report the finding of the body, so that an inquest might be held; but it occurred to him that his movements this morning might savour of madness, or worse, and he might be called upon to show why he left the shed so abruptly. He might be accused of causing the old man's death. These and suchlike thoughts ran up and down his brain for some time; then he slowly turned his horse to the west, and rode furiously till he came to the Yantala woolshed.

The men had finished dinner, had washed and brushed up a bit, and were catching their horses preparatory to dispersing till Sunday night.

Constable Duffus was coming out of the manager's hut, where he had dropped in for dinner. Bill told his tale to him, and the manager, coming up at that moment, listened with all his ears. One by one the shearers and the rouseabouts clustered, like a swarm of bees round their queen, and hung about Bill with open mouth, while he told

of finding the dead body at the Devil's Punch Bowl.

" Fwhat's this ? " said the constable ; " a man kicked de bucket widout benefit av clargy. Och ! the lonely man. To turn yer toes up to de sky, an' nobody handy to close yer eyes, is gashtly creepy."

" But what's to be done ? " said Bill. " We must give the poor man decent burial, an' find out where he came from, an' whether he has a wife or children, an' all about him."

" Them lonely buffers never have wife, nor chick, nor child, nor uncle, nor aunt, nor any other frind," said the constable. " They've got a story tacked on their back like a clout, every mother's son av thim. Or maybe, every patch on their trousers is stitched wid a mother's tears or a wife's groans. They've ginerally been turned out av the family for the drink or the disgrace av them. Tin to wan you'll find he's prison cropped, or you'll percaive a broad arrow on his small clothes."

" He looks as if he had been a decent old chap ; respectable like, honest, but poor," said Bill.

" We must have an inquisht," said the constable,

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"on Monday morning, at tin o'clock, say, at the Pretty Sally Inn. I'll requisition a cart av ye, Mr. McDonald."

"All right," said the manager.

A cart was obtained, and the constable requested Bill to accompany him to the spot where the corpse was lying. He was nothing loth, as he hoped to find out where the dead man came from, and discover the whereabouts of the girl whose portrait had so strangely moved him.

The body was taken to the inn the same afternoon.

CHAPTER III

NEXT day Bill rode to the place where the dead man's tent was still standing. The place had a grim fascination for him. Something about the old man's face and staring eyes held him in thrall. The appealing look of the girl in the photograph enchain'd him. The dream spoke strangely to his imagination. He felt that something had entered into his life. He did not feel a free man. Compulsion appeared to be laid upon him, and he could not shake off the feeling that a course was being shaped for him, a pattern was being woven which he did not design.

He lingered about the Devil's Punch Bowl all day, and wondered what was being brewed for him. He hoped it was something pleasant : a cup to his liking.

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Monday came, and the coroner arrived in a hired buggy. The constable seized upon the publican and one of his men, to serve on the jury. Then he stationed himself at the door of the inn, and impounded every man who passed along the road, until he counted ten upon his fingers, whereupon he doubled up his fists. His hands were full—the jury was complete.

The publican hustled the “good men and true” into the bar, like a flock of sheep, and was ready to “lamb” them down.

“Who stands drinks?” he said.

A man who had just finished painting the house, and was going to be paid that day, spoke up, and said, “I will; for I sees from that placard,” pointing his thumb at it, “that drinks is to be reduced to-day from a shillin’ to sixpence, so we’ll wet the occasion.”

“Give your commands, gentlemen!” said the publican; “keep the ball a-rollin’.”

“Gin for me, some’at stiff, for I can’t stand a corp,” said one of the men.

“Brandy for me, as I feel a sinkin’,” said another.

"Whisky for me ; I've a qualm in the stummick."

"Beer, that's good for a buryin'," said the wag.

The publican and his wife handed out the drinks in a surprisingly short time. In some unaccountable way the news that free drinks were about had run round the place with fleet foot, and seventeen thirsty men and women stood up to receive them ; then they drank and smacked their lips, for free drinks are sweet to the taste.

The publican poured out some brandy for himself, and immediately bawled : "Eighteen drinks, painter ; hand us over the stiff."

"Here you are," said the painter, putting a sovereign into the publican's hand ; at the same time trying to look pleased, but his mouth wouldn't go into the right position. The drawing was all wrong.

"Eighteen drinks, eighteen shillin's," said the publican.

"Old 'ard," said the painter ; "look at your own placard—sixpence each, if *you* please. I figur' it at nine shillin's, accordin' to Cocker."

"Placard be blowed !" said the publican ;

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"everybody knows that, in legal dociments, the day begins at twelve o'clock. The price of drinks before twelve is a shillin', after twelve they is sixpence. Here's two shillin's change, painter!"

"All right!" said the painter in a whisper, and with a cunning wink to the constable, "Hark you, I'll be even with him! I'll charge him nine shillin's extra in my bill for turpentine and putty."

"The Crowner is sittin', the jury is summoned! Quick; every mother's son av yees!" said the constable.

The inquest was soon over. The local doctor had made a *post mortem* examination. The verdict of the jury was, "Died from natural causes."

The clock in the bar cuckooed eleven times. Drinks were still a shilling each, so no one would venture his nose within smell of liquor for an hour at least. The jury preferred a draught of fresh air just now, as the room in which they had sat was close and stuffy. Their courage had been uncorked and spilt in the presence of the "corp," and they felt as limp as a wet rag.

Bill was anxious to get away, and he was about to jump on his horse, when the constable rushed out of the bar, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Bill Marlock," he said, "is it running yees are, an' lavin' me wid de corp, stark an' shtiff, to rattle his bones over the logs and boulders to de cimetary. Yees found him above ground, an' de laste yees can do is to see him under de turf."

"I don't mind if I do, seein' you put it in that way," said Bill.

"I thought yees would; shure he'd do the same for you any day!"

The coffin, with the dead man in it, was carried out. When the jurymen saw it they rushed forward to lend a hand, and buzzed about like flies round carrion. They felt they had an interest in the poor body within. They had "sat" upon it, and given their verdict. They had carried out the law's behest, and they would carry out the "remains" on their shoulders. Bill took off his hat, and every man followed his example. Then the coffin was reverently laid on a cart, and

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covered with old sacks. The constable climbed into the seat, gathered the reins in his left hand, and reminded the horse by a flick on the ear that it must look alive when it was carrying a dead man. The horse awoke with a start, and dashed down the road. Half a dozen horsemen, with Bill at their head, galloped after, enveloped in a cloud of dust—dust before and behind.

The funeral procession passed on at a quick pace, but had not gone many miles when the constable looked back and found that Bill was the only mourner. The other men had dropped out of the ranks, and had silently disappeared, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise.

In about two hours the constable and Bill arrived at the village of Mopoke. The only clergyman in the place was hastily summoned to read the burial service. He was writing his next Sunday's sermon, with a pipe in his mouth. He jumped up immediately, stuck his pen absently behind his ear, pulled his surplice from a peg, and hitched it over his shoulders as he made for the door. The prospect of a fee unstiffened

his rheumatic joints. There had been no burial in Mopoke for a year.

Funerals were as rare and far between as white kangaroos. The unwonted strokes of the grave-digger's axe, cutting some saplings, had rung like a knell from the cemetery in the morning, and the whole population had turned out to know the why and the wherefore. Boys and girls had played truant, and hid behind the tombs, until the school bell had ceased to tinkle and trouble their consciences ; then they kicked up their heels like a flock of lambs. They had about as little reverence for the dead as hyenas. The boys played leapfrog over the graves, and the girls ran up and down the mounds or had a game of hop-scotch on the weedy paths. Suddenly they were hushed by a solemn voice chanting the words, "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord."

The children dashed away, tumbling over each other as they rushed to the grave, and clustered about it like rabbits round a water-hole in a drought. The cart came up slowly, and the horse looked solemn. The clergyman took his stand at

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the grave, reading the burial service, while the pebbles crunched under his feet and rattled below.

The constable represented the law, the clergyman the gospel.

With the help of Bill, the gravedigger lowered the coffin to its resting-place. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," was said, and the earth was shovelled in right merrily. Very soon the old man was covered up, and tucked in his narrow bed. Only a little mound of earth showed the swelling of the puffed-up earth, proud of having swallowed another victim. *Insatiable is the grave!*

As soon as the gravedigger turned his back, the boys and girls proceeded to attest their presence as witnesses by writing their names, with knives, rusty nails, and pins, on the smooth black mound. Then there was a general exodus, and a fearful looking forward to punishment from the schoolmaster in the morning. The taskmaster was waiting for them. Pharaoh and all his host seemed to be in pursuit.

Bill Marlock heaved a sigh when he stood alone outside the cemetery gate. The old man was

buried, but his spirit seemed to haunt him. He felt as if it were floating by his side, and pushing him in the direction of the Devil's Punch Bowl.

Bill stood in the middle of the road uncertain where to go. He took from his pocket the photograph of the girl with the pathetic eyes. Then he looked at the letter, signed "Mary," and at the diagram. He felt bewitched, for the eyes appeared to glance for a moment towards the north-west, where the old man died ; the writing of the letter seemed to slope towards the same point ; and the arrow on the diagram shot straight for that goal.

Fate was too strong for him, but he would give himself another chance. He would throw his stick in the air and see how it pointed when it fell. If it pointed to the north-west, he would go to the Devil's Punch Bowl ; if not, he would go to Melbourne. He threw the stick, with many a twirl, and it fell, aiming at the north-west.

"Double, double toil and trouble," he said ; "the dream and the omens are too much for me. To the Devil's Punch Bowl I must go."

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He jumped on his horse, which had been cropping the short sweet grass, and rode as fast as he could till he came to the Pretty Sally Inn, where he had some bread and cheese, and bought some chops to carry with him ; then he rode slowly up the gully which led to the Devil's Punch Bowl.

CHAPTER IV

THE tent was standing, just as he had left it on Sunday. There seemed to be a disconsolate, pathetic droop in the limp folds of the ragged canvas. Pathos and expression are not confined to living things. Some inanimate objects are invested with joy, others with a heritage of woe. A deserted digger's tent is the mournfullest thing in the world, the embodiment of misery in every fibre—desolation painted on canvas, as never limner's brush equalled.

He unpinned the tent flap and looked in. He almost expected to see the dead man, prone on the bed, staring with glassy eyes at the ridge-pole. He went into the tent and sat down on a block of wood which had served as a seat. Then he took the portrait from his pocket, and pinned it in the

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place where he had found it. He examined the diagram once more, and tried to get at the heart of it. It had a story to tell—a riddle might be guessed from it. He was here to learn what fate would unfold.

The sun was going down full of fire : long, inky shadows were creeping up the hills. Bill watched one of them going, inch by inch, nearer and nearer to the rim of the Devil's Punch Bowl, when, lo ! just at the edge, hit by the last patch of red, stood a tree, with two branches touching the ground, as in the diagram, one on either side, as if two men were hanging there.

"That is the tree, at any rate," he said. "Happy discovery ! I'm on the track !"

Darkness began to come down like a shroud ; a dingo howled up the gulley ; a gun cracked in the distance, and echoed among the hills ; a bittern boomed its dreary call ; and a mopoke drawled its woebegone cry. Everything was weird and uncanny. Bill's hearing seemed preternaturally acute to-night. The sounds thrilled every nerve ; he felt them in his bones and marrow. He was unutterably wretched, up here, above civilisation,

warmth, and human society. He feared to be alone in the dead man's tent.

He had been pushed into his present position—mere clay in the hands of a higher Power. He felt in the presence of his Maker. He went into the tent, groped about for a candle, lit it, and fell upon his knees. When he arose there was a great peace in his soul. He was not doing his own will, but the will of Him who had sent him here for some purpose not yet apparent. It was hidden, but he had no doubt it would be made plain. It would develop as a bird develops in the shell.

He was tired, so he unwrapped his blankets, spread them on the bed, undressed himself, lay down, and was soon fast asleep.

When he awoke the sun was up, and shining cheerily through the thin canvas. Three magpies were chattering on the ridge-pole, telling the news of the night and all talking at once—all mouth and noise, like a cannon on the Queen's birthday, or like boys let loose from school—plenty of shouting, but no listening; pearls of wisdom dropping, and no one picking them up.

He rose, and made a fire by the side of a log;

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then filled the kettle and put it on ; then he went to the creek and had a wash. He felt fresh as a trout, and sat down to wait till the steam came out of the hole in the lid of the kettle. In the meantime chops were frizzling in the pan. His appetite was in a state of exultation.

After breakfast he washed up, and was then ready to dive into the mystery wrapped up in the diagram. He stood silent for a few minutes in expectation, as nature stands hushed when waiting for a thunder shower. Spreading the diagram on his knee, he pored over it for half an hour. He was at a standstill. There was a deadlock. He had got the clue to one end of the line, for the tree was on the hillside clearly enough, corresponding exactly with the tree on the drawing ; but what was the triangle at the other end of the line ? He tried to imagine a three-sided figure, composed of the creek, a fallen log, and an outcrop of the rock ; but he gave it up as a bad job, the lines being more like a dog's hind leg than a triangle. He spelled triangle over and over again. Nothing came of

it. He was fairly cornered at every point. He cuffed and whipped his brains to no purpose.

At last he looked up, and his weary eyes rested on the tent. Viewed from the front it had a triangular shape.

"Fool!" he said, "not to see it before."

A line projected from the tent to the tree would give the line in the diagram.

"Now," he thought, "I must walk over the ground and find out whether the old man intended the figures to be 45 or 65, and whether he measured from the tree or the tent." He jumped up, placed himself in a bee-line between the tent and the tree, and walked fifteen paces, each of which he believed to be three feet. This distance would make forty-five feet. Then he looked for some indication, some mark or sign. There was nothing to indicate that man had ever disturbed this solitude. Forty-five was evidently not the distance. He would try sixty-five; so he paced to about this distance and stopped, but could see nothing unusual—nothing to guide him. He felt like a blind man groping his way in the Sahara.

CHAPTER V

HE would try from the tree this time. He walked to it, then turned, and paced fifteen steps in a line with the tent. Here the ground was covered with broken pieces of quartz, but there was no mark or sign that would attract a bushman's eye. Then he walked about twenty feet more, when, suddenly, the ground seemed to give way under his feet, and he felt himself falling down a hole. He had just time to throw himself forward and clutch the solid earth. With a great effort he managed to hold on to the side of the hole and drag himself up. The excavation had been lightly covered with brushwood and earth. This was no doubt the key to the diagram, and something perhaps was to be unlocked here. Peering into the hole he saw a rough ladder, and went down it about fourteen feet. A marvellous

sight filled his eyes with wonder ! The cap of a reef had been broken off, and the stone blazed with gold. In half an hour he had picked out about twenty ounces.

He paused to wipe the sweat from his brow. What was that noise ? He heard a muffled rumbling, and the ground seemed to vibrate. Some animal was in the Devil's Punch Bowl, and was moving northwards. He lay motionless for a little while, then, as the footsteps grew fainter, he crept up the ladder, and raised his left eye above the top of the hole. A horse, with a man on his back, was slowly climbing the steep bank, and in a moment disappeared over the other side. Bill drew a sigh of relief. Last night he longed for company, now he did not wish to see a human creature. The rich shoot of gold he had come upon would make up for the poor surroundings and the awful solitude of the Devil's Punch Bowl. The gold would compensate for all.

He drew the brushwood over the mouth of the hole, then descended the ladder and lay down to rest. The excitement of finding the gold and

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the fear of being discovered had unnerved him. He was as a bow unstrung.

If it were known that he was working a rich claim near where the old man was found, it might be said that it was the dead man's, and that Bill had murdered him in order to get it. What a position to be placed in! This was the mess the Devil's Punch Bowl had brewed for him. "Double, double toil and trouble."

He must work like a mole, silently and in the dark, and must on no account show himself in the light of the sun. He would pick out as much gold as he could, and then, when night came on, he would creep up, cover the mouth of the hole, and grope his way to the tent. Of course he could go to Mopoke to-morrow and register the claim, so as to secure it against all comers. An innocent man like himself would have nothing to fear, but tongues would wag, wiseacres shake their heads, and envious eyes wink. Would it not be asked, "Why shouldn't Bill Marlock have murdered the old man?" "Wasn't it as plain as a foot-rule that he had ridden hot-haste to the place where the old man was working, and had murdered him

for the sake of the rich claim?" "Dead men tell no tales." "Out of sight out of mind." "Then, when the secret was buried six feet under ground, he had gone back to take possession of his victim's property, just as Ahab had done, long ago, when he went to take possession of Naboth's vineyard. As Ahab had suffered, so would Bill Marlock."

These and such thoughts rushed over the grey matter of Bill's brain, as the wind rushes through the tree-tops.

He lay on the rock, and picked out the nuggets with his jack-knife. When the last gleam of light faded overhead his trousers' pockets were full. There was plenty more in sight. He had come upon a veritable goldsmith's shop.

When he could see no longer, he slowly ascended the ladder and listened. All was still. Putting the brushwood aside, he scrambled out of the hole, stood up to his full height, and drew a long breath. A cricket chirped, and made him tremble. His blood raced, and his bones seemed out of joint. No further sound smote the stillness. Then he covered up the hole, as carefully as he could, and crept away to the tent.

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He dared not make a fire to-night, nor light a candle. The flickering stars eyed him, now and again, through rifts in the clouds, and enabled him to see a little.

His only thought now was to bury the gold. After a while he took a spade, and cut a solid square of earth in front of the bed, then he lifted it, unbroken, and poured the gold in the vacant space, as into a mould. This done, he fitted the piece of earth to its place again, and smoothed the edges with his fingers. Well satisfied with his work, he gave a sigh of satisfaction when he thought that Mother Earth's Bank was perhaps as safe as that of the Old Lady in Threadneedle Street. "As safe as a bank" has slipped out of our language now. We say "As unsafe as a bank," after what has occurred in Melbourne.

He tried to sleep, but the nuggets seemed to rattle through his brain like castanets at a Spanish dance. His riches oppressed him. The finding of the gold was a delight, but the keeping of it brought sorrow and trouble. He could not rest. He felt like a sentinel within forty yards of the enemy's guns, and expecting them to leap into

flame every moment. To his disordered imagination the rustle of a leaf was an assassin's tread, the croak of a frog the whistle of a bullet.

But the night with its darkness passed away, and the sun came up over the white-gums on the ridge, with security and protection in his face. It was when his back was turned that the trouble would begin again, for when the street lamps of heaven were lit terrors crouched at every corner.

He would not pass another night in the tent : nothing would induce him ! He would sleep in it all day, and work in the hole all night. There he would feel safe. He would pick out as many nuggets as he could, and flee to-morrow from this hateful spot.

He found a little stock of flour in the tent, with which he made a flat cake, then baked it in the ashes of his fire, fried a chop, and ate a hearty breakfast. His nerves, which had been unstrung, were screwed up again, and he felt as perky as the first fiddle in the orchestra.

He slept the sleep of the just, daylight standing surety for his safety.

When he awoke it was late in the afternoon.

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The sun was on the edge of the hill, and running down it like a coach wheel, without haste and without rest, and would soon be at the bottom.

As it would soon be dark he had to think in a hurry. It would not be safe to leave the tent for any marauder to enter and plunder under cover of night, while he was working at the mine. His plans were made quickly, and what he ought to do was flashed into his brain in a moment.

He went into the tent, took down the photograph of Mary, gazed into the eyes, and kissed the mouth. "All for you, Mary!" he said, then put the likeness in his pocket. He gave the poles on which the tent rested a kick, and the canvas collapsed about his shoulders. He dragged his late dwelling to the creek, loaded it with stones, and sank it in a deep pool, then hid a few utensils and useful things among the ferns.

When he could not have discerned a wild-cat's eye at ten paces, he crept to the mine and went down the ladder. He took a candle from the packet he had brought with him, and lit it. No glimmer of light could be seen from the upper regions, and no wayfarer would seek this lonely

spot at night. He thought he would be safe here, but ghosts would come trooping down the ladder, in spite of all he could do.

The words of the ninety-first Psalm suddenly came into his mind, and illumined the mine : "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." He was down on his knees like a shot, asking guidance and protection ; then rose in perfect peace, feeling safer than in chain armour, or with swords and guns by his side.

He worked steadily, breaking up the pliable stone, and taking out the gold as if he were picking plums from a pudding. When dawn showed over the top of the shaft he had obtained about fifty pounds weight, which he put in a bag. He was satisfied : he had enough. This loneliness and secrecy were too much for him. He could not bear the strain another night. Something would break.

He left the bag of gold in the mine, hidden among some loose stones, and went in search of his horse, which he found grazing by the side of the creek. He dug up the gold which he

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had buried in the tent, wrapped it in a towel, and rolled his blanket round it, then put the bundle on the horse, led the animal to the mouth of the mine, and fetched the bag of gold, which he strapped inside the blankets.

He was too excited to feel hungry. If food had been placed before him he could not have eaten any. The gold fever had taken away his appetite, as is the nature of fevers, yellow fever especially.

He covered the mouth of the hole with sticks and brushwood, then placed stones and earth over them. The excavation was cleverly hidden.

“Gee up, Brownie!”

He led the horse down the gully to the main road, and went along it due east, up hill and down dale. In three hours he looked down upon the blue smoke, which ascended from fires that cooked late breakfasts in the sleepy town of Mopoke. In another half-hour he had caused the manager of the Bank of Victoria to raise his eyebrows an inch higher than usual in pure astonishment, when he unpacked the gold and laid it in a glittering heap on the counter.

"For heaven's sake," said the manager to his assistant, "lock both the front and back doors, and bring out the revolvers! The bank is closed till the escort goes out."

The gold was weighed, and kicked the beam in pure frolicsomeness, at 77 lbs. 7 oz. 7 dwt. It changed hands, becoming the property of the bank; and Bill went away, feeling as light as a feather, with a deposit receipt for a handsome amount, and a lot of sovereigns in his pocket. Then he went to the hotel, put his horse in the stable, with a feed of oats under his nose, and took a square meal himself of the best the house afforded.

CHAPTER VI

AFTER the escort left the bank the sensational find of gold was whispered into a few greedy ears ; then it was retailed, with large margins, and soon found its way to the bars of public-houses, where it was hammered into the counters with clenched fists or pewter pots.

It was noised abroad that Bill had taken lunch at the “Shearer’s Arms.” A few of the astute townspeople, with their weather eye open, determined to shepherd him and dog his footsteps. The landlord hoped to “lamb” him down.

The Melbourne coach suddenly came out of a cloud of dust, and drew up at the door. Bill was expecting it. He quickly paid his bill, and arranged to send his horse to grass for three months. Then he went outside, and sauntered up and down with the air of a man who had

come to stay and enjoy himself. The bystanders gazed their fill, and gloated over the hid treasure that was supposed to be stowed away in his pockets.

"All aboard!" shouted the coachman from the box seat.

"Wait a moment!" said Bill while he sprang up beside him. "All right, driver!"

The off-leader got the tip on the right ear from the whip, which wakened his front half and made it spring in the air. Away the four horses went, scattering a flock of geese which was picking up a living on unconsidered trifles. There was a roar of disappointment from the astute ones.

"Blast 'im! if 'e 'asn't give us the slip!" said one.

"D——!" said another.

Another swore at large; hissing, red-hot, as from a furnace.

Another hastily unfastened the bridle of a horse from a hitching-post—which horse belonged to a respectable farmer—jumped on the animal's back, and went clattering down the street in chase of the coach. He said to himself, "He won't throw

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me off his tracks, darn him ! I'll see where he goes !”

This man followed the coach till it was beyond the auriferous country, and far into the night; then his horse, which had shown unmistakable signs of giving in, refused to go another step.

At twelve o'clock next day Bill arrived in Melbourne. He did not say a word to any one about the gold. He kept the secret locked. He had settled it in his own mind that he was holding the money as a sacred trust for Mary. He was only the custodian, and not the owner.

The whole affair was bordered and fringed with the miraculous.

His first concern was to find Mary. That was the platform. “Seek, and ye shall find.” That was the first plank. How it would shape who could tell ? He would try to fit all the pieces into their places in his rough stumbling fashion, and leave a higher Power to do the smoothing and joining. He was in love with Mary, and hoped to get “spliced” some day. “Marriages are made in heaven.” He had unbounded faith that there would be one on earth soon.

He went to the *Argus* office, and wrote an advertisement, in which he described Mary and the old man as well as he could, and stated that she would receive a legacy on application to B. M.

Next day he got an armful of letters from Marys who had lost a father, and hoped they had found a legacy. He was astonished to find how many girls so exactly answered the description of the Mary he was in search of. Before night he had written and posted letters to all the applicants, requesting them to meet him at his hotel next day.

At the hour appointed for the interview, babies in arms, children, young women, middle-aged ones, toothless spinsters, and grandmothers, were sent in to him, one after another, and dismissed with scant courtesy. His Mary was not among them.

He haunted the streets by day, and the theatres by night, in the hope of seeing her. He would know her eyes anywhere. If he met her he would almost greet her as an old friend, so well did he seem to know her.

Weeks passed away. As he could find no

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tidings of her he was getting downhearted, and was almost giving up the search, when, as he was passing along Brunswick Street, an interesting, youthful girl came out of a shop, and walked on before him. Something about her attracted his attention, and he followed her. She was evidently a servant. Suddenly she stopped at the gate of a respectable house, and turned her face towards him. Her eyes flashed across his bows, revealing the object he was in search of, as a harbour light reveals the port. It was his Mary !

He was not quite so sure the next moment, for her face underwent a change. The temporary brightness had disappeared ; the lights were out, and a hopeless sorrow seemed to rest upon it. There was no feature he could identify. He stood bewildered, and then she was gone. He was conscious of a closing door.

“ I was a fool ! ” he said. “ Why didn’t I ask her if her name was Mary, and settle the matter off-hand, receipt the account, and think no more about it. At the first glance I could have sworn she was Mary ; at the next she seemed to have retired behind a veil, and was not the same—

only a pretty girl with a melancholy cast of countenance. My imagination is playing tricks."

His hands shook, and his knees trembled. He supported himself by the railings in front of the house. Looking up, he saw a policeman eyeing him with suspicion, so he walked away to avoid being made a gazing-stock.

When he got to the end of the block, he upbraided himself for not making inquiries at the house into which the girl entered. He went back, and stood at the railings, taking a mental inventory of the house from the sky line to the earth line. A notice in the window, that board and residence might be had within, gave him an idea. He had thought of changing his lodgings, so he would knock at the door and make inquiries.

He rapped, and a servant came. He had expected that the other girl would appear, and flash her eyes at him as before.

"I came to make inquiries about board and residence," he stammered.

"I'll call Mrs. Blenners; walk in, sir."

He walked in, and Mrs. Blenners walked in

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behind him. She had seen him from the window, and was ready, like a tug steamer, to take him in tow, and bring him to good anchorage, with room to swing between the front parlour and the best bedroom, where he might spend his days in comfort and his nights in peace.

He looked at the best bedroom, and inspected the front parlour. He liked them ; then hummed and hesitated, and had a question on the tip of his tongue about the girl he had followed, but drew it back just in time, as he reflected that so prim and well-starched a lady as Mrs. Blenners would extinguish him as she would a candle, and leave him in the dark—then farewell to further inquiry in this quarter.

Seeing him hesitate, and thinking he might slip through her fingers, she went into action, and fired argument, persuasion, and flattery at him. Before he knew his whereabouts he was carried by storm, and surrendered, paying the first indemnity in the shape of a fortnight's board and lodgings.

“ I shall come to-morrow,” he said.

He went to his hotel, but could not rest. The

face he had seen visited him in the night, and he was sleepless. Sometimes he felt sure he had found Mary, and was glad ; but doubts would march in again, and his hopes were elbowed out of the way.

CHAPTER VII

A BOUT five o'clock the next day the rumble of a cab was heard by Mrs. Blenners, who was lying in wait.

"It is Mr. Marlock!" she shouted, with two concave hands at her mouth; "show him into the best bedroom."

Bill was ushered in by the servant who had opened the door the day before, and was swept up the stairs with his portmanteaux. When the bell rang for tea he went down to the front parlour, where twelve lodgers were already seated at table. Mrs. Blenners tossed her head towards Bill, and said, "Mr. Marlock"; then made her forefinger travel round the table, like the hour hand of a clock, while she ticked off the boarders, one by one, and repeated their names.

Introductions over, they all fell to on the viands

with the energy of the feeder of a sewing-machine going at full speed.

Bill was on the watch, but the girl he was in search of did not appear. He heard Mrs. Blenners say to Annie the waiting maid, "Tell Mary to make more toast."

"This is hopeful," thought Bill; "but Mary is such a common name."

A week passed away, but he had not seen Mary. He was beginning to get impatient, and meditated a walk into the kitchen when Mrs. Blenners was upstairs. Just when this thought came into his mind he heard her say, in a stage whisper, "Mary, you have forgotten the slops."

The rattle of an iron pail was heard, and a light footstep ascended the stair. He waited, and watched for Mary to come down. When she was coming down he was going up. They met half-way. She looked scared, as she was caught carrying the slops, which should only be removed when no man person was near.

She would not look him in the face, so he could not see her eyes, and the light was bad. She was certainly something like his Mary, but not

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altogether. His Mary had a bright face; this one was sad. Sorrow had limned it, and grief had sculptured it.

He went into his room, and found that the washstand was in disorder, so he knew the girl would come up again as soon as he was out of the way. In the impulse of the moment he took the photograph of Mary, and the letter she had written to her father, and placed them prominently on the washstand; then he ostentatiously went downstairs to the parlour, and shut the door.

As he expected, the girl went to his room, which was just overhead. In a short time he heard a scream, and a heavy body falling. Instinctively he understood, and ascended the stair like a flying shadow. The girl lay white and motionless, with the letter in her hand. The scene required no explanation. It told its own tale. She reminded him of the old man, lying stiff and stark, by the side of the creek. He ran to the door, and, with a voice of urgency, shouted, "Mrs. Blenners!"

"Mercy! that's the new lodger," said Mrs. Blenners to Annie; "do you think he's mad, or dr——, I mean elevated?"

She dropped the rolling-pin on the paste-board with a clatter, and dashed her face with flour in her excitement, then fled upstairs as fast as her tottering legs would carry her. From the top of the landing she looked into the best bedroom, and there, to her horror, she saw Mary lying on the floor, apparently dead.

“Murder!” she screamed.

Annie, hearing this blood-curdling word, rushed out of the front door, and fell into the arms of a policeman, whispering “Murder.”

The policeman, seeing the open door, went into the hall, and saw Mrs. Blenners wringing her hands, like wet cloths, over the banisters.

He took four flying leaps, and stood beside her.

“What’s the matter?” he said.

She silently pointed at the best bedroom.

At that moment Bill put his head out at the door, and said, “She’ll be all right soon!”

He had dashed water in her face, and had put a pillow under her head. Mrs. Blenners and the policeman bent over her as she was opening her eyes.

“She fainted,” said Bill.

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A doctor was sent for. He hustled up the stairs in a few minutes, and said to Mary, "How are you now?"

She gave him no answer.

"Ah, ah! I see," he said, "we must exhibit a little sal-volatile."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Blenners. "We don't want to exhibit her any more. She's made an exhibition of herself enough already. Such a thing never happened in my house before. Mr. Marlock, I'm sorry this has occurred in your room."

"I'm not," said Bill; "I've been hoping and praying to find her for a long time. Look at that photograph, and tell me if it is Mary's portrait."

"Yes! it's the very moral of her."

"Well! I've found her."

"Found her out, do you mean?" said Mrs. Blenners. "Are you a detective? A wolf in sheep's clothing—which devour widows' houses! I thought you was a respectable single gentleman. I'm ashamed of you! Mary's as good a girl as you'll find in a summer day's march."

"You mistake my meaning, Mrs. Blenners; Mary has been left some money, and I have been

looking for her, and have found her here, like a diamond in a—a—gutter," he said, for want of a better word at the moment.

"Gutter! forsooth," she said. "Do you liken my house to a gutter?"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Blenners; I meant to say like a diamond glittering in the golden setting of your most respectable house. Besides, I have to thank you for giving me the opportunity of finding her here. I'm sure you've been kind to her."

"Kind! I've been a mother to that girl."

"Where is my father?" said Mary, looking wildly around.

"Poor girl!" said Mrs. Blenners; "she hasn't heard from her father for months, and she thinks he's dead."

"He is dead," Bill whispered to Mrs. Blenners.

"Then she might have seen his ghost."

Mary now sat up, and pointed to the letter which was still in her hand.

"Where did you get that?" she said to Bill, "and that?" pointing to the photograph.

Bill told as much as he thought necessary, while

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the girl rose to her feet. Gradually, and as gently as possible, he told her of her father's death, also that he had advertised for her, and now, after a long time, had found her, and that she was the owner of thousands of pounds.

Mary could hardly believe her ears. She seemed to hear the words in a dream, and did not understand the meaning of them. They appeared to be the echo of something she had heard long ago.

In a short time she had recovered her usual composure, and was told, in the privacy of Mrs. Blenners' own room, the sad particulars of the finding of her father's body. She wept as if her heart would break. Then, bit by bit, he told the rest of the story—about the inquest, the funeral, the gold-reef, its great richness, and that the wealth obtained from it, amounting to thousands of pounds, was hers. At the same time he handed her the bank deposit receipt, and said, “It is all yours.”

“No!” she said, “you are too generous.”

She positively declined to take it till she had time to think the matter over.

“This is all high falutin!” said Mrs. Blenners.

She took the practical view of the question, and

hurried away, with Mary under her wing, to one of the best shops in Bourke Street, where she bought, greatly to her delight, the best black materials for many dresses, besides bonnets, hats, gloves, etc. Mary was a passive instrument to be played on for her delectation. Mrs. Blenners spent a few happy hours. Shopping was a fine art which thrilled her soul. Money was of no consequence. It was like the "Old Man" plain of Riverina—there was no end to it.

Bill Marlock had told her to spend as much as she liked.

"That's a large order!" she said.

"Cut and come again; she's rolling in riches," said Bill.

So Mrs. Blenners had set off on the shopping campaign with a light heart.

For the next few weeks Mary and Bill were much together, she questioning, he informing her of everything she wished to know about her father, and of all that he himself had done on her father's behalf.

She thought Bill was one of the kindest and most disinterested of men.

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When she was suitably attired in deep mourning, she was allowed to accompany Bill to the bank, to draw such moneys as were required, but Mrs. Blenners insisted on going with them for propriety's sake. They often, however, managed to get away when she was busy with her household duties, and had many pleasant excursions into the city and suburbs. They were both happy in each other's company.

On one of these excursions, Bill advised her to apply for a lease of the land comprised in the Devil's Punch Bowl, and have it thoroughly worked for the rich gold which was there.

"There is a great fortune lying there, and it's all yours, Mary," he said.

"And what will you do if I apply for the lease?"

"You might make me manager of the mine, if you can trust me," he said.

"Trust you! I would trust you with all I have got."

"If you will trust me with yourself, Mary, that is all I ask. I have loved you ever since I saw your photograph in the tent."

They looked at each other, and saw the honest light of love shining in each other's eyes.

She trusted him with herself, and has never regretted doing so.

The lease was applied for, and granted. The Devil's Punch Bowl became a scene of activity. A house was built on its rim for Bill and Mary. Men were employed to work the mine. Machinery was erected, and the stampers were soon playing merrily to the tune of five hundred ounces of gold a week.

Many years have passed away, but the mine is still worked with fair results. Bill and Mary have every reason to rejoice at the good fortune brewed for them in the Devil's Punch Bowl.

Bill has not forgotten his old friends of Yantala woolshed ; for Norman Campbell, Jack Jewell, Tom Wren, Peter Amos, Sandy McKerrow, the stalwart giant with the shock of red hair, and others, are in positions of trust at the mine, and swear by him. Their children grow up and call him blessed.

LANKY TIM

CHAPTER I

THE evening air was hot and oppressive. Whisperings of a north wind came over the hills. The old gum-tree, which grew over the homestead, quivered, and turned the edges of its leaves to catch the silvery light of a new moon, which cut its way across the sky. The swish-swish of wild cats and the cries of opossums were heard. A weird boom, from bittern or bonyip, came from the swamp, and the curlew's solemn call echoed in the ranges.

“Just the time for love!” So thought Lanky Tim, who stood leaning against the doorpost of the kitchen. He seemed to be holding it up with the angle of his left shoulder. The light of a great, blazing fire fell upon his sharp, handsome face.

Annie Coonie, the cook, was bending over a

large basin into which honey was dripping from a sack hanging by a hook over the mantelpiece. Two of the station hands had cut down a “bee-tree” on Vinegar Hill, and had brought home the contents of the hive. The honey was coming from the sack as clear as amber and smelling of wattle-blossom.

“Now, listen to me, Annie,” said Tim; “you’re as sweet as honey, by a deal: that’s the blasted trnht, an’ no mistake about it.”

“Oh, go away, Tim! you’ll not earn your pound a week, an’ found, by holdin’ up that post—chances are you’ll carry it away like as Samson carried off the gates of Gaza.”

“Who’s he, Annie? Seems I’ve heard o’ him. I’d more likely carry you off. I’ll make a lady of yon if you’ll only say yes. You’ll have a silk dress, a diamond ring, an’ servants to wait on you. I’ve got 640 acres of good land, two houses in Melbourne, an’ money in the bank. Just say you’ll be mine, and they are yours!”

“Nonsense! Rich men don’t work for twenty shillin’ a week, an’ live in a slab-hut.”

"I only do it, Annie, to be near you, an' that's no lie."

"Near, an' yet so far," as the dog said to the possum up the gum-tree."

"If you'll only marry me, you'll never need to work another stroke, Annie. We'll go to the theayter every night, an' be as happy as the day is long."

"Samson carried the jawbone of the ass in his hand ; you carry it in your head. Clear out ! If Alec comes he'll give you a good hiding."

Alec was Annie's sweetheart, and she expected him any moment. She was loyal to him, never allowing her thoughts to wander to any of the many suitors for her hand. She was a selector's daughter, and the *belle* of all the Broken River district.

"Alec's a poor sort of chap for a handsome girl like you to marry," said Jim.

Annie's face was aflame in a moment. Before a rough sarcasm could rattle out of her mouth, a big figure darted across the open door. An arm shot out and gave Lanky Tim a clout in the ear, which sent him sprawling on the ground. He

scrambled up in a hurry, and disappeared behind the projecting stone chimney.

Alec, for it was he, went into the kitchen laughing, and rubbing his knuckles, which had been jarred by coming in contact with Tim's ear.

"I saw Tim making love to you, Annie," said Alec.

"What did you say to him?"

"Not a word; but he'll hear my reply tingling in his ear for a long time."

"I told him you would give him a good hiding. He said he had 640 acres of land, two houses in Melbourne, an' money in the bank. He offered to give me all if I would marry him."

"The honnd!" said Alec; "he hasn't 640 pence to bless himself with. He's the greatest bragger in Australia. When the boss took him on he had hardly a shirt to his back. He hadn't been a week on the station when he made out as how he was a nobleman's son in disguise, an' that his uncle had left him a stack of money, but he wouldn't take it yet, as he wanted to get Colonial experience."

"It's my opinion," said Annie, "that he left

the shirt you speak of with his uncle, to raise the wind which blew him up here. It's all blow with him!"

"Blowed if I can make him out," said Alec. "Last week he said he had found a gold-mine. Yesterday he bragged he had discovered diamonds. The more a man brags the less in his bags. The less a man knows the more he blows."

"That basin is about full of honey, Alec. Reach down another, an' put it under the bag while I take the full one away. So, that will do."

Alec seated himself on a chair, as far from the fire as he could, and mopped his brow with a whitey-brown handkerchief. The heat of the kitchen was stifling. It was hot enough outside; here it was almost unbearable. Annie was as cool as a cucumber. She was accustomed to a roaring fire, even when the thermometer stood at a hundred degrees in the shade.

A fit of silence came over Alec. He knitted his brows, and looked thoughtful. Jealousy was creeping into his heart, although he did all he could to shut it out. There it was, however, and had taken possession.

Annie took a wicked delight in his misery.
She saw what was the matter with him.

“Lanky Tim said I was as sweet as honey.”

“Blast Lanky!” said Alec, scowling.

“You can’t brag like Lanky Tim!” retorted Annie.

“No, I give him best at that! Dang him, if I don’t give him pepper before I go to bed this night.”

“Or mustard,” said Annie.

“He may need a poultice.”

Silence reigned for awhile, broken only by the loud tick of the clock on the mantelpiece and the drip of the honey. How long this state of things would have lasted no one knows. Just at this acute stage a loud scream was heard from the front of the homestead. A rushing of feet and banging of doors followed. Annie and Alec jumped up, made for the door, ran round the dwelling-house to the end of the verandah, and listened.

CHAPTER II

WOORONG STATION was owned by an old Scotchman named McKeel. He was of medium height, red-haired, somewhat bald, with blue eyes, aquiline nose, large mouth, and an inquiring face, sprinkled with freckles, like patches of clay on a ploughed field ; wrinkled with the chiselling of many years and the rubs of fortune.

He was standing in one of the front rooms, speaking to Mrs. McKeel, and David, his son.

“ Ma dears, this wee eenstrument ye see in ma han’ is desteeden to save the lives o’ mony o’ the sons o’ Adam wha may be bruised i’ the heel, as the Scripture has it, by the serpent ; which I tak’ to mean ony beast o’ the breed, either whip snake, black snake, brown snake, or tiger snake. If a man or woman, or bairn for that maiter, is bitten by a snake, let them be brocht to me, as quick as may be, an’ I’ll inject into their foreairm

a drap or twa o' ammonia, which I hae got frae Melbourne this vera day, alang wi' this eenstrument, by post."

"How wonderful, papa!" said Mrs. McKeel.

"I don't believe it," said David.

"What can ye expec' frae a pig but a grunt," said his father, turning savagely round; "ye are sceptical, Daavid, in things above an' things beneath. Ye dinna follow the sayings o' ye'r namesake the sweet singer o' Israel. A greater than him said, 'Ye will not believe.'"

"Well, father, I wasn't meaning to say I did not believe you; but what I wanted to say was I did not think this hypodermic injection of ammonia, by the instrument you speak of, will cure snake-bite."

"Weel, weel, seein's beleevin'! The proof o' the pudden is the preein' o't. When ye'r opeenion is asked ye may speak; no till then!"

"I am sorry, father."

"Sorry here, sorry there, will never cure a man who is bitten by a snake, or by the Auld Serpent himsel', wha is the Deevil. Pit that in ye'r pipe an' smoke it!"

This was a knock-down blow from which David could not come up smiling. He raked the ashes of the fire smouldering within him, and smothered it. He had to let off the smoke by breathing hard.

His father looked at him and said, "Ye'r namesake says, 'he puffeth at them.' My advice is keep ye'r breath to cool ye'r porridge."

David was about to reply, but a warning touch, under the table, from his mother's foot, made him pause.

A piercing scream was heard outside, and a rushing of feet. The old man looked over his spectacles towards the door in momentary fright. David stood up waiting. Mrs. McKeel said, in a low voice, "Papa ! what's that ?"

They had not long to wait. A man bounded over the low fence which enclosed the verandah, then ran to the door and opened it with a loud bang. It was Lanky Tim. His eyes were starting from their sockets. He had no hat. His hair hung in a dishevelled mass over his forehead, like an inverted last year's nest. He had the look of a madman. He sank on the sofa and moaned.

"What is the maiter wi' ye, Lanky?" said old McKeel, now thoroughly alarmed.

"I have been bitten by a snake," groaned Lanky, through his set teeth.

"Ma sang!" said McKeel, "ye've come to the richt shop. Whaur's the bite?"

"Here," said Lanky, pointing to the calf of his left leg. Then he curved his body like a bent bow, and made the most hideous grimaces, lapsing into an idiotic stare.

"Jist the seemptoms," said McKeel, as he quietly filled the little instrument, which he still held in his hand, with a drop of liquid ammonia.

"Noo, Daavid," he said, "rax me the brandy bottle, an' pit it doon beside me; then hold Lanky's leg while I mak' the injection."

David did as he was told. His father pinched the leg, just above the marks of the snake-bite; then he inserted the point of the instrument into the flesh.

Lanky jumped as if he had been shot, and capered about the room. The injector fell from the old man's hand. An oath nearly slipped off

his tongue, but he caught it back just in time, and said :

“ Dog-on it, man ! you’re deed as a sheep in a butcher’s shop if ye’ll no be still till I get the ammonia inside o’ ye ! ”

“ Brandy,” said Lanky faintly, sinking again on the sofa.

Mrs. McKeel poured out a tumblerful, and handed it to David, who put it to Lanky’s lips. The liquor went down his throat with a gurgle like storm-water into a culvert.

“ I feel better,” he said faintly ; “ that did me good ! ”

“ Don’t you lippen to brandy,” said McKeel, “ it never cured a true case o’ snake-bite. You jist let me inject a drop o’ ammonia into ye, there’s a good fallow ! It’s the new pan-a-kee.”

“ Panacea ! father,” said David.

“ Pan-a-fiddlestick,” said the old man.

“ If that’s it, fire away ! ” said Lanky.

Old Mr. McKeel filled the injector again, and inserted it in the puncture he had already made, then squirted its full contents in the flesh, with a force that sent the needle-point nearly to the bone.

The effect was magical. Lanky roared like a bull, and threw up his legs, knocking old McKeel head-over-heels. In the fall he struck the ammonia bottle, which was standing on a chair, and tipped it over, spilling the contents.

"That was the effec' o' the mediceen ! It was instantaneous ! He got the strength o' three men in a meenit. He's a'richt ; he's cured !" said McKeel.

Lanky fell back on the sofa, writhing and wriggling like one possessed.

Alec and Annie Coonie, who had heard and seen everything through the window, which had no curtain, now opened the door and came in.

"Can we do anything ?" they said.

"Yes, Alec," said old McKeel ; "you tak' a horse an' ride across the range to the mine for Max Hicsh. He's a sort o' doctor body, who was a student at Gott-again."

"Göttingen, father," said David.

"I have na time to argal-bargle wi' ye," said his father, "but I say it's Gott-again. Weel ! he has a decree, I believe."

"Degree, father," said David.

"Losh ! I'm no sayin' there is na degrees among doctors ; some wise an' some foolish, jist the same as sons. Ye mind me o' a preacher, servin' what he calls the gospel frae an empty spoon oot o' a hogshead fou o' naething. Howsoever, it's life an' death noo ! Sa, bring Max as quick as ye can, Alec."

Alec ran to do the old man's bidding, with Annie at his heels.

"Tell my mother to come," she said; "she knows as much about snake-bite as any doctor."

When she had given him this message she went back to the room where Lanky was lying.

CHAPTER III

A GREAT change had now taken place in the patient's condition. Convulsive movements of a violent kind had set in. Old McKeel was alarmed. David was cynical, and doubted the symptoms.

"Brandy," said Lanky, in a whisper.

He gulped a tumblerful down, smacked his lips, and stared around.

"Where am I?" he said ; "oh ! I see."

"That's a guid sign !" said old McKeel. "The ammonia's workin'."

"Mr. McKeel," said Lanky very feebly, "I'm goin' to die, an' I want to make my will."

"Vera weel ; I'm a magistrate, an' I'll attest it. Ma wife an' son will be witnesses."

Mrs. McKeel, with tears in her eyes, placed pens, ink, and paper on the table. The old man seated

himself, and adjusted his spectacles. He looked over them and said, "What d'ye want me to say?"

"I leave everything I have to Annie Coonie."

"My!" said Annie, in a whisper.

McKeel scribbled away as fast as he could, shedding ink all around him. After writing for a few minutes he turned to his son and said, "Give him mair brandy, and don't let him sleep."

"Can ye gi' me some parteeclar's o' what ye want to leave Annie Coonie?" McKeel said to Lanky.

"Yes; £500 in the Savings Bank, £750 in the Union Bank, and £1000 in the Bank of Australasia."

"Gosh!" ejaculated McKeel.

"O my!" said Annie, as she threw her apron over her head.

"Ony other parteeclar's?"

"Yes, six hundred and forty acres of land."

"The man's cracked!" muttered McKeel to himself. "It's the ammonia makin' his heed licht. They a' get crazy on land."

"Ony other parteeclar's?"

"Yes, two houses in Melbourne."

"Ony other?" said McKeel, looking dubiously at Lanky.

"Yes, £15,000 left me by my Uncle Tom."

McKeel looked up in astonishment. Seeing Annie at the door he could not help saying, "I congratulate you, Annie."

"Is Annie here?" whispered the patient.

"Step forrit, Annie," said McKeel.

Lanky took her hand. She was crying.

"Don't cry for me," he said; "only say you love me. It will be a great consolation to me. You see how *I* love you."

"Oh yes," she sobbed; "I hope you will not die. You'll soon be better."

"Never! but I die happy with your hand in mine."

At this moment Mrs. Coonie, Annie's mother, came in. She was a little woman, with a clay-coloured face, and dressed in the same hue.

She took possession of the case at once with a business-like air.

"Plenty of brandy," she said; "then march him up and down. If he is allowed to sleep, he is a dead man. Black snake, or tiger?"

“Tiger,” whispered Lanky.

“Then there’s no hope,” she said, turning to McKeel ; “he’ll die when the moon goes down. That’s the time they die when bitten by a tiger-snake. At the sea it’s when the tide goes out.”

“Then there’s nae time to lose,” said the old man ; “I’ll read the will in the hearin’ o’ ye a’. Attend to what I say, Lanky.”

“I’m listenin’,” he whispered.

McKeel pulled the lamp nearer, adjusted his spectacles, and read as follows :—

“*This is the last Will and Testament of me, Timothy Wilber, at present residing at Woorong Station in the Colony of Victoria. I hereby revoke all Wills by me at any time heretofore made. I appoint—*”

“Timothy Wilber, who do you appoint your executor ?” said the old man.

“I appoint you, Mr. McKeel.”

McKeel wrote his own name, and continued to read :—

“*I appoint Dugald McKeel, of Woorong Station, in the Colony of Victoria aforesaid, to be my Executor; and direct that all my just debts and*

funeral and testamentary expenses shall be paid as soon as conveniently may be after my decease. I give, devise, and bequeath unto Annie Coonie, Spinster: £500 in the Savings Bank, £750 in the Union Bank, £1000 in the Bank of Australasia, 640 acres of land—”

“What parish?” said McKeel.

“Parish of Ayre.”

“Parish of Air,” wrote McKeel.

“*Parish of Air, two houses in Melbourne, also £15,000 left to me by my Uncle Thomas. In witness whereof, I, the said Timothy Wilber, have, to this, my last Will and Testament, set my name, this fifteenth day of November, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-six.*”

Then came the attestation clause. Lanky signed the Will with much effort. The two witnesses signed, and the document was complete.

When Mrs. Coonie heard in the reading of the will that her daughter was left a legacy of £500 she clucked her tongue in astonishment. The next item of £750 made her start. The £1000 one caused her face to glow like fire, and her eye to sparkle like a diamond.

"You are a rich woman, Annie," she said, nudging the girl; "but where in thunder did he get the money?"

"I don't believe a word he says," Annie replied.

"Do you think," said her mother indignantly, "that a man standing at Death's door is going to stagger in with a pack of lies on his back?"

When McKeel read about the six hundred and forty acres of land, Mrs. Coonie jumped up, and looked over his shoulder to make quite sure the words were written down. When he came to the £15,000 she rushed out, and danced a jig on the verandah to relieve her feelings. When she was sufficiently calm she went back to the room. The will was now signed.

"There is only one thing to be done," said Lanky very feebly and with great difficulty. "I want Annie to say she loves me."

"Oh no, no!" she said, bursting into a fit of crying.

"Say it to please him!" said her mother. "Don't you see he's dying?"

Before Annie knew what she was doing she said, "I am sorry for you, and love you."

"More brandy," said Lanky ; "I feel the poison working."

"Poor fellow ! poor fellow !" said Mrs. Coonie, rubbing her eyes.

"It does me good to hear that Annie loves me. I want her to say if I live she will marry me."

Her mother touched her, and said, "Say yes, you little fool ! Don't you see he's going out with the moon ? "

"Yes," said Annie, in a hysterical fit of weeping, adding under her breath, "Oh, Alec ! it's for your sake."

Lanky fell back, and shut his eyes, muttering, "That's all right."

They stood round him, watching and waiting. McKeel was confident his patient would pull through, for he was sure he got a full dose of ammonia.

CHAPTER IV

A BIG man, with a broad face and yellow beard, came in. This was Max Hiesh, the mine manager, and sometime medical student of Göttingen.

“ Vell, Mr. McKeel, how vas you now ? ” he said, in his bustling way. Seeing Lanky, breathing hard, on the sofa, he added, “ Mine Gott ! vat is dis ? ”

McKeel told him, in a few words, what had been done, and that he had successfully injected the ammonia.

“ Dat is good, mine friend ! dat is good. You haf safe his life.”

“ I thocht,” said McKeel, “ that it wad be mair satisfactory to hae a medical man here to gae the poor fallow every chance.”

Max drew np his coat sleeves, turned back his

shirt cuffs, gave a tug at his collar, put one hand over Lanky's heart and the other on his pulse. He wore a serious look, then a puzzled one: his lip curled, and a smile danced over his face.

"Heart goot ; ferry goot ! poolse goot ; ferry goot !! preething goot ; ferry goot !!!"

McKeel jumped up and skipped about, snapping his fingers. He was jubilant at the effect of the ammonia.

"What de ye think o' the heap-odermic injection o' ammonia noo, Daavid ? I'll write to the *Argus* aboot this won'erfu' escape frae the grave, or the bottomless pit for that maiter. Lanky may tak' a thocht an' mend frae the error o' his ways after this meeracle."

"All right, father, all right !" said David.

"A' richt, a' richt !" ye say. I should say it's a' richt ! Here am I, fechtin' wi' the case, an' ye havena lifted a han' to help me. I'm thinkin', but for me, Death wad hae his dart or his scythe into him by noo, an' whar wad his soul be, I should like to ken ?"

Max stood up, and began to laugh. "Donner

und blitzen! I haf not look at de pite of the snake. Vare is him?"

"On the calf o' his left leg," said McKeel.

Max peered at the place for a few minutes.

"Dat is no more like de pite of a snake dan it is like de pite of a flea!"

"I tell ye," said McKeel, "it was a tiger-snake that bit him. Your remarks are clipped o' common sense."

"Mine friend, Mr. McKeel, I do not believe, I say, I do not pelieve he has been pitten at all!"

"What! Do you mean to tell me that he's no been bitten by a snake, when I ken better?"

"No, mine friend! He is dronk! dronk as a man who the fiddle plays."

"Drunk as a fiddler, you mean," said David.

"Ya! dronk as two fiddlers!"

"Ma sang! I hae a verra sma' opeenion o' the University o' Got-again, if that's a' ye ken aboot snake-bite!" said McKeel.

"Mine friend, he is what you call sham."

"Do you think a man would sham," said Mrs. Coonie indignantly, "when he is dying?"

"Mine goot friend, Mrs. Coonie, he has not

grappled mit de King of Terrors yet. It's King Alcohol dat's got hold of him."

"Don't you tell me! I've lived in the bush, maid and wife, twenty years, and know snake-bite. Besides, hasn't he settled his affairs—made his will, in fact, most sensibly, and left all he has to my Annie."

"She vill not haf a heavy boondle to carry; dat is what I say."

"Indeed! You know nothing about it. It turns out, as I always said, that he is a rich man in disgrace, and fell in love with my daughter and wanted to marry her. Now he has left her all he has."

"How much?" said Max.

"Six hundred and forty acres of land, two houses in Melbourne, £15,000, besides other sums in the bank."

Max laughed loud and long, bursting out again and again. David joined in the fun, to the disgust of his father and the indignation of Mrs. Coonie. Annie wept bitterly, with compensations for her grief floating before her of untold wealth.

"Dis is goot fun," said Max; "goot fun! plain

as *blitzen*. Lanky wanted to marry Annie. He pricks himself mit a pin, shams he has got a snake-pite up his legs, flams he is going to kick de pucket, makes his will, leaves £15,000, two houses, and six hundred and forty acres of land to her mit his great love. He vill recover. Oh yes ! Annie vill marry him to-morrow. Do you all tvig ? ”

“ For shame, man ! ” said Mrs. Coonie.

Annie shed floods of tears, and wrung her hands. McKeel glowered over his spectacles, darting fiery glances at Max from his ferret-like eyes.

“ I tell ye, Max, ye are jist jealous o’ the new cure for snake-bite. The honour an’ glory of savin’ his life is mine ; for the poison was workin’ in him like yeast when I tackled him. It was gallopin’ through his veins, like a wild horse fleein’ up the hills.”

“ Mine friend ! if he had any poison in his insides, he must haf swallowed some of his own venom ; or maybe it vas de brandy ? ”

“ Hoot, toot ! what’s a spoonful’ o’ brandy here or there ! Nae mair than a grain o’ common sense

in a hogshead o' wishy-washy Got-again University stuff!"

Lanky stretched himself, opened his eyes, yawned, and looked round in a dazed sort of way. All eyes were turned to him.

"Where am I?" said he; "I thought I was dead. Oh! I remember; I was bitten by a snake. I feel better. I think I'll get over it."

"Give God the thanks, Lanky!" said McKeel solemnly, "an' me, as the humble eenstrument."

"I'll never forget your kindness, Mr. McKeel, never!"

"I'll tak' a little brandy, jist to steady ma nerves after this excitin' nicht," said McKeel. He reached over for the bottle. "Losh! it's empty. It's as toom as a whistle!"

"Has he dronk de whole bottle?" Max asked.

"Every drap!" McKeel replied; "so, if he's drunk, nae wonder, but that does not dimeenish the vertues o' the ammonia."

Lanky staggered to his feet, and tottered to Annie. When he reached her his legs became entangled and gave way. He sank into a chair

beside her. His mind and tongue were sober, but his legs were intoxicated.

"You are mine now, Annie! You said you loved me, and you promised to marry me."

"Yes, Tim," said Annie, with a simper.

"Then we'll get out o' this. When I'm in the open air, an' souse my head in a bucket of water, I'll be all right. That ammonia did the trick, Mr. McKeel!"

"I declare!" said Mr. McKeel, "the feelin's o' the patient is mair tae be relied on than a' the opeenions o' the doctors."

Lanky rose to his feet, supported by Mrs. Coonie and Annie. They went away, by the back door, to the kitchen, saying as they were going, "Thank you, Mr. McKeel."

"Weel, it's pleasant," said he, "to meet wi' thankfu' folks, no like some I could name, wha are no far aff but winna."

"Good-bye, Mr. McKeel," said Max; "I must be what you call toddling. You haf your opinion, I haf mine. You'll see all I haf said vill come true."

"Good-bye, Max," Mr. McKeel said. "But I

say it was a genuine case of snake-bite, for I saw the patient frae the first, an' you didna ; but thank ye a' the same for comin', though we'll differ aboot some things tae the end o' the chapter."

Max shook hands with Mrs. McKeel and David, and then went home.

In about an hour after this McKeel went to the kitchen to see how Lanky was getting on. He found him as sober as a judge. In the meantime he had soused his head in a bucket, and had drunk a pint of water.

"Ma sang!" said the old man, as he went to his bedroom, "that fallow had a near shave ! But for me he wad be a corp !"

Lanky went to the men's hut, and Mrs. Coonie shared Annie's bed for the night.

CHAPTER V

MOTHER and daughter lay for hours talking about the wonderful change that had come over their lives, like shadows changing into gold on the mountains. It was a fairy tale, full of romance. A prince had come, in a golden coach, to carry Cinderella away.

“ What a blessing, Annie, that I came and ordered brandy. That’s what saved him ! As for ammonia, it’s the first time I ever heard of it for snake-bite. When I was a girl it was used as smelling-salts. If old McKeel had put it to Mr. Wilber’s nose, it might have done him good.”

“ He drank an awful lot of brandy, mother.”

“ Yes ; in cases of snake-bite they can take bucketsful and not be drunk.”

“ But he was drunk, mother ! ”

"No, only his legs, and no wonder, after being bitten by a tiger-snake. However, it's a good thing for you he got over it."

"I don't see that, mother. If he hadn't got over it, I would have got the money, land, and houses all the same."

"And marry a low fellow like Alec! Fancy him riding in a carriage beside you!"

"I would rather marry Alec, an' sit beside him in a kitchen, than marry Lanky, an' drive in a carriage."

"Well, I am astonished at you! Where is your thankfulness to your Maker for pitchforking you into a silk gown and carriage?"

Annie began to cry. Misery was creeping in. Happiness was melting away like sugar in a tea-cup.

She fell asleep, and forgot her troubles. Mrs. Coonie kept awake all night, turning over in her mind Annie's fortune on one side, and her love to Alec on the other. Her thoughts were bright, or dark, at intervals, like the revolving lantern on a lighthouse.

The sun rose like a red-hot cannon-ball, hitting

the bull's-eye in the window pane, and splintering fragments of light over Mrs. Coonie's face.

"This is no time to lie in bed," she said to herself ; "I'll get up, for I've much to say and do. I must go home and tell him" (meaning her husband). "I'll be bound he's snoring in bed, and knowing no more about all this than a sucking baby."

Suiting action to words, she jumped out of bed and dressed herself.

Annie awoke from a troubled dream. Tears stuck in her eyelashes like dewdrops in the grass. She wiped them away, and looked up with a woe-begone face.

"Annie," said her mother, "I am going home to tell your father. We'll come over by ten o'clock with the buggy. Dress yourself in your best frock. We'll all go to Benalla, and if Mr. Wilber wants to marry you off-hand, he can, this very day. The sooner the better. He won't want to see you work as a servant another minute, I'm sure."

Annie looked through the window. In a moment she was out of bed, and had thrown her clothes on, anyhow ; then she ran into the kitchen,

opened the door, and stared out. A horse, with a saddle on, was cropping the short, yellow grass. The bridle was muddy, and trailing on the ground.

"Mother," she said, "that's Alec's horse. He must have been thrown off, perhaps killed."

A man was chopping wood about a hundred yards away. Running up to him, she said, "Where is Alec?"

"'Spouse he stayed at the mine all night. Never saw him after he went away to fetch Max Hicsh."

"But there's his horse saddled an' bridled!" said Annie.

"That's nothing," said the man. "Like's not he hitched up the horse at the mine, and it broke away. Do you think Alec would walk home on a dark night? 'Not if I knows it,' says he."

"I know Alec better than that," said Annie. "He must have been thrown off. Is there a horse in?"

"Yes, Brownie and Whalebone."

Annie ran to the stable, shot the wooden bolt, and went in. She put Mrs. McKeel's saddle on Brownie, slipped a headstall and bridle on, then led him out. Jumping on his back, she galloped

away, across the creek, and along the track she knew Alec must have taken when he went on his last night's ride. In half an hour she drew up at Max Hiesh's door.

“Coo-ee !”

“Vat is dis ?” said Max, putting his head out of a window, a long pipe in his mouth, his blue eyes staring in wonder.

“Where is Alec ?” said Annie, her face flushing red.

“Vare is Lanky Tim, I say ! He had a fine hand of trumps last night, and von de game. Has he revoke ? I mean de vill.”

“Is Alec here ? Answer me that !”

“No, he is not.”

“Where did he go when he was here last night ?”

“He said he would go home by de short cut.”

She turned her horse's head without another word, and rode up the hill, taking a bee-line for the homestead. After riding for five minutes she heard some one “coo-ee.” Her heart beat wildly ! She knew the voice ! A short search resulted in finding Alec lying in a clump of ferns.

"Oh, Annie, how I have been longing for you ! I knew you would come."

"What is the matter with you, Alec ? Are you hurt ?"

"I was thrown last night, and my ankle's broke."

She jumped off Brownie and was down among the ferns in a moment.

"My poor Alec ! Oh, how sorry I am ! I'll help you on the horse, an' Max will set the bone."

She raised him up and managed to put him on Brownie ; then led the horse down hill to the mine.

Max set the bone and put the leg in splints, then drove the patient to the homestead, Annie following on Brownie. Alec was lifted out by David and Max. He was placed in a spare room at the back of the house.

CHAPTER VI

M R. and Mrs. Coonie came up in their buggy, and were joined by Lanky Tim. He proposed that he should marry Annie at once. The nearest clergyman lived at Benalla.

"We give our consent," said Mrs. Coonie.

"Sure-lye!" said her husband, who usually said "ditto," and played second fiddle.

"I'll go and see if Annie is ready," said her mother.

Annie was in the kitchen. Mrs. McKeel was there also, having been obliged to prepare breakfast. She was standing over a tub washing dishes.

"Good morning, Mrs. McKeel," said Mrs. Coonie; "I hope it won't inconvenience you if Annie leaves at once. She is to be married to-day."

"To Lanky?" said Mrs. McKeel.

"Yes ! She's the luckiest girl in the world."

Annie began to cry. Alec's accident had brought on qualms of conscience. She had been led into promising to marry Lanky, on the spur of the moment, for the sake of his wealth, believing he was going to die. She could not tell what to do. She was sitting on the middle of a see-saw, and did not know which end to slide to.

"Come, Annie ! don't be a fool !" said her mother ; "you'll have a carriage to ride in, silks and satins to wear, a fine house ; and you'll hob-nob with the Governor's Lady."

"Mrs. Coonie," said Mrs. McKeel, "I think you are too hasty. Annie does not know her own mind. Give her time. Max Hicsh and David believe that Lanky has not a penny to bless himself with. Don't you think the account of his wealth is only a made-up affair—a cock-and-bull story ?"

"I believe every word he says. You can see he is a gentleman in disguise," said Mrs. Coonie.

"Better sure than sorry. Make inquiries first."

"No," said Mrs. Coonie ; "delays are dangerous. Come, Annie, you promised before witnesses to marry him. Don't perjure yourself!"

The girl rose very reluctantly, and was pushed by her mother towards the buggy, which was standing a few yards away. She was crying bitterly.

"What's all this, I would like to know?" roared Alec, who had thrust his head out of the spare bedroom window.

No one replied. Lanky became white as a sheet, and trembled like an aspen-leaf.

Alec, by the aid of a stick, came hopping out at the back door. He held on by a water-but, and said, "Annie, what's the matter with you? What's the meaning of all this?"

"They want to force me to marry Lanky."

"And you don't want to?"

"No," she said faintly.

Hearing the hubbub, David and his father came out, and were told what was going on. David laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"You mak' the maist solemn occasions a target for ye'r mockery, Daavid. Hold ye'r whisht!"

"I can't, father. It's as good as a play. It's a comedy of the first water. Ha, ha!"

"To hear a son o' mine talk o' play-actin'! If

I thocht ye had ever been in a playhouse, or theatre, as ye ca' it, I'd strike ye off wi' a shillin'."

"Listen to me, father, and all you people," said David, pulling a sheet of paper out of his pocket. "I found this behind the sofa where Lanky lay last night. It must have fallen out of his pocket as he wriggled about. I did not know what it was till I read it, and, as the reading will do much good, I don't think I ought to consider it a private or privileged document. It's a letter from Lanky's mother to him. Here goes :—

"‘13, FURZE STREET, COLLINGWOOD.

"‘MY DEAR SON TIM,—

"‘This is to say as how my rheumatics is very bad an I done not a days washin for a month every stick of furniture is sold I have not a shillin Send me som money for the love of God at wanct.

"‘Your pore old mother

"‘BRIDGIT WILBER.’”

Tim looked as if he would gladly have sunk into the earth. He was taken aback, and said nothing.

"I think, father," said David, "I have run a coach and six horses through the will; I think I have scotched this snake, this colossus of wealth ! Saul slew his thousands, but David has slain his ten thousands."

Mrs. Coonie went up to Lanky, with her double fists on her hips, her face the colour of a red brick, and opened fire.

"You viper ! you toad ! you snake ! What have you got to say for yourself ? To think that I should swallow your story as easy as you swallowed the brandy. I'll horsewhip you, you hound ! "

She was about to seize the whip from Coonie's hand to carry her threat into execution, when old McKeel stepped forward, and said,—

" You dodrotted heepocrite, that I snatched frae the jaws o' death ! To think ye should be sa near ye'r end, an' tell a pack o' lees—red-hot lees, I may say ! Won'ner they didna burn ye'r tongue. You'll be ca'in on Lazarus to dip the tip o' his finger yet to cool it. You seasoned leear ! I tell ye tae ye'r face that Ananias was struck deed for a hantle less than ye hae done. An' tae think that my ammonia should be slopped like a cup o' tea

ower my carpet, insteed o' savin' the lives o' them
that's mair deservin'. Blast ye ! Tak' that ! ”

He struck Lanky with a heavy stock-whip, which made him jump.

“ It’s a pack of lies ! ” he roared, turned round, and fled.

Max Hicsh came up at this moment, and took in the situation at once. He, David, and Alec laughed like to split their sides. Old McKeel was livid with rage. Coonie was in his buggy, as stolid as a native bear, trying to light his pipe. His wife turned to him, having no other vent for her anger.

“ You old fool ! is this a time to smoke like a chimney, when you ought to be down on your knees asking all our pardons for nearly leading Annie into a terrible scrape ? ”

“ My word ! ” was all Coonie said, as he thrust pipe and tobacco into his pocket.

“ I’ll send a pound to old Mrs. Wilber by to-day’s post,” said David.

“ Deduct a half-croon frae it to pay for my ammonia,” said his father.

“ I’ll let her starve ! ” said Mrs. Coonie, as she

mounted the buggy, took the whip out of her husband's hand, and drove away without saying another word. She looked upon them all as conspirators who had been plotting to marry Annie against the will of her mother.

"He never vas pitten at all!" said Max. "De marks vas made by a pin vich I found in his coat mit de plood on it."

Annie went into the kitchen, and took off her best frock, then put on her working dress, and resumed her duties as cook.

Max helped Alec to his room, telling him to lie down, and give his leg a rest.

"A word with you, Mr. Hicsh."

"Vat is it, Alec?"

"When I was thrown off my horse, I waited anxiously for daylight. The time passed heavily on my hands. I looked about me, and used my eyes. I saw a reef cropping up among the ferns, and chipped off some of the stone. It was full of gold. What do you think of that specimen?"

He had taken from his pocket a lump of quartz studded with gold. Placing it in Max's hand, he waited for his opinion.

"My gootness ! dat is de richest bit of quartz ever seen on this place ! Your fortune is made!"

"What I propose," said Alec, "is that you go an' peg out the ground, an' apply for a claim in your name and mine. I'll go half-shares with you."

"Mine goot friend ! many tousand tanks. Do you tink I would set your ankle's bone, and take advantages of you vile you are hopping apout on one leg ? No, no ! mine friend. It is your reef. If you make me de manager of de mine dat is all right!"

It was so arranged. Max found the reef by tracking Annie's horse from his own door. He pegged the ground, and applied for a lease. The first ton of quartz yielded 50 ounces of gold. The first six months' work produced 2721 ounces.

Alec Smith was a rich man. He married Annie. They live in a comfortable house adjoining the mine, and are very happy.

No one on the station ever heard of Lanky Tim again.

LOST IN THE BUSH

CHAPTER I

THE sun sank like a bird into its nest. A pink flush spread upwards and melted in the deep blue; the dappled clouds caught the warm glow and spread themselves out to bask in the lingering rays. Soon a rosy red, deepening every moment, shot higher and higher, then suddenly began to pale and shrink, until the sun had drawn every bit of colour after him and said “good night.”

It was a quiet, peaceful spot. Hills all around—east, west, north, and south. A mountain, in a sheet of ghostly white, stood afar off. A valley filled the foreground with grey mist, creeping down. A burnt-sienna track wound about “One Tree” hill like a snake, and led to Borombyee homestead, which could be seen on the banks of a little creek.

The soft footfall of a horse was heard behind some boulders. A merry snatch of song floated on the still air. A horse and its rider came round a bend of the track. They were on their way to Borombyee. The rider was Alec Keryle of Glengo Station.

Alec was in love, as any one could see at this moment. The mask was off. When not alone the visor was down. There are times when a face can be read like a poster on a hoarding. At other times it is a blank wall. He gazed long and fondly at the homestead: a light streamed from the dining-room window. "There sits my darling Elsie!" he said, as he patted his horse's neck.

He was a laggard in love, and had never told her that he loved her. He had shown her that he cared for her when they had once or twice been alone, and he thought she cared for him—that was all the length he had got on the "primrose path"; but he had screwed his courage up to-night, and was going to tell her that he loved her and would ask her to be his.

He was a shapely young fellow, and sat his

horse to perfection. He had a long, straight nose, firm mouth, solid chin, black eyes and hair, and an olive complexion. He was about six feet in height, and carried all his inches without a stoop.

Elsie McLean was the elder daughter of Donald McLean of Borombyee Station. Her father was a dark, gloomy Scotchman, with never a ray of sunshine in his nature. She was fair, with golden hair, blue, dancing eyes, a rosebud mouth wreathed in smiles, a Grecian nose, and with a dimple in each cheek. She was born under Australian skies; he among Scotia's grey, frowning mountains.

They had been coloured by their surroundings. Her mother was dead, and she had one sister, named Maggie, aged fourteen.

Meanwhile, during this digression, Alec was guiding his horse down the gravelly track. His eyes were still on the homestead, but they ranged from point to point when the dining-room window became hidden from view. As he turned into the main road which ran up the valley, he saw a light streaming from the kitchen door and a thin column of smoke rising from the kitchen chimney.

When he opened the home-paddock gate a light in Elsie's room caught his attention, and he threw a kiss in its direction. Just then her ears began to tingle and grow red, for some one was surely thinking of her. Shutting the gate, he went off at a quick canter, and did not draw rein until he clattered across the sapling bridge, which spanned a small dry water-course within fifty yards of the house. Four or five dogs rushed out, barking furious defiance, until Alec said, "Down, Rover," to the leader, who began to caper and wheel with his tail in the air in a whirlwind of welcome ; and the younger dogs followed suit when they were assured, on the best of authority, that the new-comer was a friend, and not a stranger to be barked at, and bitten if need be, or at least sworn at as a trespasser. They accompanied the horse to the stable door, and when Alec alighted Rover jumped up and put his nose under an outstretched hand which patted the rough head. Then the other dogs made themselves acquainted with Alec's trousers, so that they might know him again, anywhere and everywhere.

A man came out of the shadows.

“Good evenin,’ sor,” said the groom, or man-of-all-work, whose duty it was to attend to the stable, milk the cows, chop wood, and do such odd jobs as were required.

“Good evening, Pat ; all well here ?” said Alec.

“All well ! Glory be to God, masther Keryle, an’ Miss Elsie bloomin’ an’ gay, an’ wishin’ to see somebody I don’t mane to name for the wurld.”

“Now, Pat, none of your blarney !” said Alec, as he slipped half a crown into the man’s hand. Pat took the reins, and led the horse into the stable, where a munching of teeth soon followed.

Alec went round to the front of the house, turned the button of the little gate at the end of the verandah, and knocked. The McLeans were at dinner. Maggie jumped from her seat, and opened the door.

“How do you do, Mr. Keryle ?” she said, taking his two hands, and pulling him into the room, which opened on the verandah. Her father rose solemnly, with the expression of a mute at a funeral. He squeezed Alec’s hand with a warm grip. That was his one sign of welcome. He had not a word for it in his dictionary, or he could not

find it at a moment's notice, so he left it unsaid and sat down.

Just then Aggie, the housemaid, whispered to Elsie that Mr. Bond, who was a neighbour, had just ridden up and was coming in.

Meanwhile, Maggie, who had been sitting next to Elsie, hurriedly shifted her plate, and motioned to Alec to take her place. He, nothing loth, did as he was told, and sat down.

Elsie was not pleased with Maggie, and she thought Alec was too presuming. He had no business to sit down beside her at the invitation of a mere girl. He took it for granted that he had a right to sit by her, and she resented it. Besides, what would Mr. Bond think? She would teach Alec a lesson. Her smiles vanished, as sunshine before a thundercloud. She retired within herself, and answered him in monosyllables. He did not know where the machinery had gone wrong, but he saw there was something out of gear. A knock was heard, and the housemaid opened the door. She looked over her shoulder, and said, "Mr. Bond."

McLean rose as before, dumb as usual, but he

gripped Bond with two hands, and held him as in a vice. This was his warm welcome, for Bond was a great favourite, and the eldest son of an old friend.

Aggie, out of pure mischief, placed a knife and fork for him on the other side of Elsie, and he sat down. She shook hands, and entered into an animated conversation at once. Alec's spirits fell to zero as Elsie's rose. Her face flushed, and she seemed brimming over with pleasure.

"Confound Bond!" thought Alec; "what business has he to come here interfering with me? I'll give him a piece of my mind on the first opportunity."

Maggie came to the rescue, and talked to Alec. She saw that the team did not pull together, and were kicking over the traces. This was her way of putting the case. She knew a good deal about horses, and thought they had much in common with men and women. Her own pony always shied at a particular tree on the track to the woolshed, but when grazing in the paddock she would often be found rubbing herself against its rough bark. Elsie was shying off from Alec,

whom she liked, and giving all her attention to Mr. Bond, whom she did not like one bit. Maggie would coax the pair into better behaviour, and see if they could not pull together.

Aggie, on her way to and from the kitchen, could be seen stuffing the corner of her apron into her mouth, and swallowing a burst of laughter which was just about to break out.

"When did you leave home, Alec?" said Maggie.

"About four o'clock."

"A.m., or p.m.?"

Alec made no reply. He was listening to what Elsie was saying to Bond. Jealousy was rioting in his heart, and he had no ears but for the woman he loved.

"Morning or afternoon?" persisted Maggie..

Alec turned a perplexed face to her, and said, "It's night, of course."

"Oh, I know that," she said, in a low voice, "and very dark and gloomy."

The sarcasm did not hit the mark. He confined his attention, apparently, to his plate; but his ears were lent to his right-hand neighbours,

whose conversation never flagged. They rattled on at a good pace over the familiar tracks of station topics.

By-and-by dinner was over. The room in which they were seated was dining-room and drawing-room combined. The McLeans had primitive ways, and money was scarce, so the old house had not been added to. Everything was plain and simple. McLean would not allow anything to be changed. The whole place reminded him of his wife, and he would not alter or add to the house.

The front door was thrown open; the family and the two visitors trooped out on the verandah. Elsie sat on a short seat, and Bond placed himself beside her. There was only room for two. Alec had not bargained for this. He had thought that Elsie would relent, and, when they were out of the glare of the lamps, return to her old manner with him. He could not imagine what had offended her; but evidently something had started up between them—some misunderstanding on her part, some rumour; some busybody's poisonous tone; something he had unwittingly said or done.

Just now it was plain he was not wanted. He was out of the running. He wasn't in the swim. He was out of his reckoning, and among the breakers. He thought all the billows were going over him.

McLean retired to a corner of the verandah, and spun his own troubles out of himself, and wound them about him in solitary companionlessness.

Maggie put her arm into Alec's, and drew him to the end of the verandah, and pointed to the Pleiades, which were shining with their ghost-like light.

"Father was reading to us yesterday in the Bible where Job said, 'Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades?' and I asked Elsie to show them to me last night. Are they seven sisters, do you think? Elsie says they are. I wonder whether they are happy. We are only two sisters, and I am not happy."

"Neither am I," said Alec.

"Elsie is not happy either. She does not like Mr. Bond one little bit."

"She seems happy enough. Canst thou bind

the sweet influences of a laugh? They are sweet to one and bitter to another. I can't bear to hear her laughing like that with Charlie Bond. He and I are not very good friends. I have a good mind to saddle my horse and ride home in the starlight."

"Oh, do not do that!" said Maggie in alarm. "Elsie would be sorry. I am sure she would. I won't let you go. I'll hold you tight. You are angry, and you will require to be answered out of the whirlwind, like Job."

Alec shook his head. He was calming down under the spell of wise little Maggie. No, he would not saddle his horse and ride away just yet. That would be too much of a telltale. Elsie would understand, and gloat over his trouble. Bond would triumph, and take his scalp. He looked upon himself as wiped out, and not fit to cumber the ground any longer. He would go away somewhere, anywhere, and make no sign. He would henceforth be dead to Elsie, but not buried. He would get over it. He would not let any one dance over his grave, or jeer at his tomb-stone.

The morbid thoughts that flit through the brain of the slighted lover are amazing and wonderful. The figments and pigments are all wrong. It is a mad world ! and love is akin to madness.

There was a little bedroom at the end of the verandah, which the local clergyman occupied when on his visits to Borombyee. It was called the "prophet's chamber"; partly for this reason, and partly because Elsie pencilled the name on the door after hearing her father read in the Bible about the woman of Shunem, who asked her husband to make a little chamber on the wall for the prophet Elisha.

When the clergyman was not at Borombyee Alec always had the "prophet's chamber."

He could not stay on the verandah any longer, so he cudgelled his brains for an excuse to get away. He would go to bed; that was the best place for him.

"I have a dreadful toothache, Maggie," he said. "Please make my excuses to your father and Elsie. I can hardly speak. I shall come to prayers when the bell rings, if I am better; but do not expect me."

"I am so sorry," said Maggie ; "and I hope you will soon get better."

"Good night, Maggie," he whispered.

"Good night, Alec."

He went into the "prophet's chamber," and shut the door.

CHAPTER II

A LEC, having lit a match, found the bed, table, stool, and candlestick as Elisha did in Shunem. He sat down to think. Yes, Elsie was a flirt, and had cruelly slighted him. He had done nothing to deserve such treatment. A girl who could act as she had done was not deserving of the love of any man. There was a false note in her character somewhere, and she could not be the true and gentle girl he had fondly imagined. To be warned in time was lucky, for to be tied to such a woman was not good. Better to be free than bound by a chain ; and so on his thoughts ran, shooting hither and thither with the speed of summer lightning.

How long he sat thus he could not tell. An opossum called to its mate in the gum-tree that overhung the room. The “swish, swish” of a

native cat came from under the floor. A koala, or native bear, roared from the clump of timber near the creek. A dingo howled on the hills, and a hawk wheeled overhead. One of these sounds made him start to his feet. The candle was burning low.

A bell rang. It was ten o'clock, the hour for "worship." He could hear McLean clearing his throat in the dining-room, which was only separated by a thin wooden partition from the "prophet's chamber." Then he heard Elsie's light step, but thought it sounded sad and slow; then came Bond's hateful creaking boots; then Maggie's quiet tread. Aggie came from the kitchen, three men from the hut, and Pat, though a Roman Catholic, came too, "to plase Miss Elsie. An' sure," he used to say, "there's no praste widdin fifty moiles to give a curse to me sowl, pinnance to me body, an' a hole in a big cheque to pay for absolution from the sin av it."

When they had all sat down McLean opened the big family Bible, apparently at random (but with intention, as he had been studying the passage) at the twelfth chapter of the Book of

the Revelation. He read, with a deep, sonorous voice, to the end ; then gave a long sigh, and plunged into a commentary on the “great red dragon,” which he said was the Roman Catholic Church. He proved this, to his own satisfaction, seeing she had shed the blood of saints and prophets, and that the popes, cardinals, priests, and all who had the “mark of the beast” upon them, were to be thrown into the bottomless pit. He drew a gruesome picture of their writhing and torments in the true Calvinistic fashion of forty years ago.

“Holy Moses !” said Pat in a loud aside.
“The saints defend us !”

Elsie nudged her father’s arm, but he would not stop, for he had got on his favourite topic—the one subject on which he could be loquacious.

Pat could not sit still another moment. He glared at McLean, and made a gesture as if he would like to throttle him ; then, apparently thinking better of it, jumped up, threw down his chair with a clatter, flung open the front door, and stamped up and down the verandah, vowed vengeance.

Alec had heard everything. He had forgotten his troubles. He laughed and rubbed his hands, and even capered about the room. It was all so ludicrous and absurd, and he had to let off the steam by rolling on the floor for a minute or two.

Some one knocked at the door, and he called out, "Who's there?"

"It's me, sor."

"Well, Pat, what's the matter?"

"Fwat's the matter? Everythin's the matter! I'm goin' to brek every bone av' the boss's body before I say me prayers to the Vargin this blessed noight!"

"Whist! I'll come out to you, Pat."

"Do, sor."

When Alec came out, he said: "Not a word here. Come to the hnt, and tell me all about it. What is the matter?" He pulled Pat away by sheer force to the hut, and pushed him into a seat.

"Now what is it?" he said.

Pat told him what had happened, in his rich oily brogue, and with such queer antics and

gestures, Alec could not help going off again into a fit of laughter.

"You'll be the death of me, Pat, if you say another word. It's too funny!"

"I'll be the death of ould McLean, the bitter, black, Presbyterian devil's own favourite son. Och! he'll be roasted for this loike a herrin' on a gridiron! Och! the devil will toast him on a pitchfark. He'll be basted an' hauled over the fire till he roars blue murther! Och! the thafe! I shpit upon yees as I would upon Judas who was wan o' the same kidney!"

"Here, Pat," said Alec, "is half a sovereign for you; don't say another word about it."

Pat winked, and pocketed the money.

"Spache is silver, an' silence is goolden. Mum's the wurrd. Love ye're inimy is a goolden rule. I'll obsarve that same, as I've got the Queen's countenance for it in me pocket."

He seized a stick which was lying in a corner, whirled it round his head three times, and brought it down with a whack on the table.

"What's that for, Pat?"

"That's wan for me inimy. It's that same he'd

be afther havin' if yees hadn't intervaned wid de gospel av paice. Sure, I repinted av takin' de money, so I let de devil go out av me through de shtick. I feel betther after that, bedad!"

"Well, go to bed, Pat. I hear the men coming." So saying, Alec slipped out of the door, and crept under cover of the shadows, until he reached the back of the house; then he paused to listen. On tiptoe he reached the "prophet's chamber," went in and shnt the door, then flung himself on the bed. He had been a fool he thought. He should not have allowed Elsie to see that he cared one jot whether she showed attentions to Bond or not. But why should she so markedly slight himself? He could not understand this, unless she had wished to make him jealous, or unless she was a flirt, and deliberately flung away one who loved her, for a brief amusement, *pour passer le temp.* In this case she was cruel and heartless. Unless he had seen her conduct he could not have believed she would have acted as she did.

What was to be done now? He could not face Elsie and Bond next morning. He could not endure to meet them at breakfast. The air was

full of electricity. The explosives were stored, the train was laid, and a chance spark might cause a blow-up which he would ever regret. He felt like a volcano which might burst forth at any moment. Discretion is the better part of valour ; he would cool down before morning perhaps.

He heard low voices in the dining-room.

“ Good night, Mr. Bond,” said Elsie.

“ Good night,” said Bond.

Alec heard her footsteps and the shutting of her door.

“ Good night, Mr. McLean,” said Bond.

McLean shook hands in silence, and both men went to their respective rooms.

Alec peeped out of his window, and saw a light in Elsie’s room, which was only a few feet away. If he could have seen her at that moment, he would have perceived her lying on the bed, with her face buried in the pillow, and sobbing bitterly.

She had discovered she had treated Alec badly, and was afraid she had done irreparable mischief. She felt as if she could almost go down on her knees and ask his forgiveness. She saw what a

mistake she had made, but it was made on the impulse of the moment, and her pride would not allow her to acknowledge it, by word or look, until it was too late ; but in the morning she would make amends for the temporary eclipse by shining all the brighter when she saw him, and, poor fellow ! he had toothache too ! She was so sorry ! She had arranged everything in her own mind. There would be no more unhappiness between them. Then she went to bed and was soon fast asleep.

Alec saw that her light was out. “Heartless !” he said, “and here am I tossing undressed upon my bed, a prey to unrequited love, and torn by a thousand bitter thoughts, vainly regretting what might have been. It is all over. There is no more happiness for me in this world. Love is dead.”

He lay for hours rolling from side to side, and felt as if sleep had fled for ever. He could not close his eyes, and he longed for daylight that he might get up and ride away from this now hateful spot. The sight of Bond would madden him ; better they should never meet.

He could endure his thoughts no longer. They

were fevering his blood, parching his tongue, and setting his brain on fire. He jumped up, put on his hat, and let himself out by the window, which was wide open, as he feared the door would make a noise if he attempted to leave by it.

He felt better now. The morning air cooled his cheek ; the fresh breeze chased away his distempered fancies.

He went quietly to the stable. No dog barked, for they all knew who was moving so stealthily. A faint flush was tinting Pepper Hill. The rosy dawn would soon outline the picture, and colour hill and vale with a flowing brush.

He saddled his horse and led him out, then mounted, and rode slowly away.

The soft footfall of a horse awoke Elsie. She started up in alarm, and looked out. What she almost feared had come to pass. In the dim light she saw Alec riding away. She had mortally offended him. She would never see him again. The dream of love was ended. She dropped on the bed, and gave way to a paroxysm of weeping.

CHAPTER III

THE sun was glinting in the tree-tops. A flock of yellow-crested cockatoos awoke the echoes with their chatter. Magpies scattered the dew-drops in the grass, and sang love songs to their mates. Bell-birds rang their morning chimes, and the whip-bird cracked its lash, as Alec rode up the hill with bent head and heavy heart. What a contrast to yesterday evening, when he had ridden down with the air of a conqueror ! Now he was going up vanquished. Life is all ups and downs. To make the simile correct he ought to have been going down hill, but the physical map is not laid out always according to the fitness of things.

His horse had a weary climb to the top of the hill, grunting and groaning at every step, while his rider sighed like a north wind on a sultry day. At last the highest point on the track was reached,

and the horse stood still to rest, as he gave a snort of satisfaction because the worst part of the road was over, and Glengo, with its cool stream and juicy grass, lay at the foot of the hill.

Alec turned round to take a last look at Borombyee homestead, but he could only see the top of the chimneys.

“Appropriate,” he said; “all ended in smoke. Good-bye, Elsie. I shall never see you again.”

He took off his hat, and let the breeze, which rustled up from the south, ripple through his hair. The cool air was refreshing, and he felt better. He wouldn’t think of his troubles, but let them blow off and be carried away for ever. He felt soothed for a minute or two ; but they would come back to roost, and brood, and hatch, in spite of all he could do.

“Confound Bond !”

He had just got the words out, when a snake glided across the track and caused his horse to shy. Alec made a savage cut with his stock-whip at the reptile, and left it writhing in the dust with a broken back.

“Wish it were Bond !” he said.

He dug his spur into the horse, and went cantering down the hill, with a flush on his face ; for he was ashamed of his evil thoughts, and repented of his violence to the horse.

“ Poor fellow, poor fellow ! ” he said, patting the beast’s neck, “ I am sorry.”

He felt better now. The fit was going off. He hoped for the best, and trusted time would cure him of the distemper. If only Bond did not cross his path all would be well. He would be as a red rag to a bull, and he would shun him as a mad dog shuns water.

He arrived at Glengo about nine o’clock, glad to be home again. He tried to wear a smiling face, but could not succeed. His mother met him at the door, and threw up her hands.

“ Why, Alec ! You must have been early afoot. Are they all well at Borombyee ? What’s amiss that you are home so early ? Has pleuro broken out among the cattle, or scab in the sheep, or is the country on fire ? ”

“ They are all well at Borombyee. There is no pleuro, or scab, or fire.”

“ Thank goodness ! I was afraid something had

happened." She saw something was amiss—something lurking in his eyes. She guessed her guess, and made a cast with her sweep-net of questions and caught him in the meshes. She knew now ; the secret was revealed ; it lay in the depth of his eyes. There is not much that can be hid from a mother.

She watched him at breakfast, and kept the conversation going to cover his retreat within himself. He ate little, and said less. His father, good, easy man, listened to his wife's talk, which rippled and flowed like a brook in the sun. He had the gift of silence, like many bushmen who have been much alone—who have communed with the great mountains, the wide-spread plains, the quiet clouds, and the silent stars.

"I can't get a word in edgeways," he said, laughing.

"You've got one in flat, at last," she said, "but it will be a long time before you can coin another ;" and she rattled on with her bright talk.

After breakfast Alec's father rode to the drafting-yards, where some fat sheep were on the point of starting for the Melbourne market. Alec strolled

down the creek on pretence of going to the killing-yard. He wanted to be alone. He would fill up the day somehow, by "topping up" a fence here, by straining a wire there, and by straightening a post anywhere.

He did not go home to luncheon ; he was not hungry. The longer he kept from the search-light eyes of his mother the better it was for him. In the dusk, or lamplight, he would be all right. He could run in under the battery with lights out and masked fires.

At dinner he was more at ease. His mother did not appear to watch him, excepting in the most casual way. His father told him, in the briefest, jerkiest sentences, that he had drafted a flock of sheep for Melbourne, picked out four lame ones, skinned one that was smothered in the yard, and spliced a broken leg.

When Alec had gone to bed his mother had a long talk with her husband. She hinted that their son was not looking well. She thought the hard work of shearing-time had been too much for him, and that he required a change.

"Hoots ! do I ever get a change, or need one ?

No. Alec's all right; right's a trivet. If a man thinks he wants a change, make him work. If he wants more change, give him more work. If he wants a spell after that, more work still. Work never killed a man. Work while it's day is scripture an' sense."

"Yes, John; but all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy!"

"I say, all play and no work makes Jack as bad as a Turk!"

"Oh, John, you are the sweetest and best boy in the world, and the best worker; but every one is not like you. Besides, you know, you have had several changes. You went to Melbourne just before the fat sheep were sold. You went after shearing to see your agents, and Alec has not been in sight of the sea for years."

"Well, wife, you are about right, or as near's may be." Here he relapsed into silence. "I was just thinking," he resumed, "that Alec might get a bit o' a holiday, and do some bnsiness as well."

"Yes, John."

"What say ye to him goin' to Melbourne to see the flock o' fats sold at the Flemington Yards?"

“ That is a very wise suggestion, John.”

“ It will do the laddie good ; he’s sharp enough. There’s a lot of hanky-panky about horse dealers an’ sheep buyers, I can tell ye. I wouldna trust a wheen butchers an’ buyers. They hae what they ca’ a ‘ knock-out ’ among themsel’s—that’s lettin’ each other buy at their ain price, an’ robbin’ the seller.”

“ A good idea, John ! It will give Alec some experience and insight into business. Also, you might give him some messages to the agents. The interest they charge you is too high. Ten per cent. is rather steep, as you say, sometimes. He might get money cheaper.”

“ A grand idea, wife ! You’ve hit the right nail on the head a clapper.”

“ You might give Alec a letter to your friend the Hon. James McClure. He is a good man, and a leading light in the Kirk. I would not wonder but he would let you have the money at eight per cent.”

Mr. Keryle spoke to his son next morning, and told him what he wished him to do in Melbourne. Alec jumped at the idea. It just suited him

exactly. He only wanted a decent excuse to go away for a time. Besides, the visit to Melbourne would make Elsie believe that this was the cause of his hurried departure from Borombyee.

This unexpected turn of affairs put Alec in better spirits. The wheel of fortune favoured him. He was more like himself to-day. In a day or two he would turn his back on the country, which reminded him of Elsie, and lead a new life, not thinking of her any more.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Elsie came to breakfast on the morning that Alec had so hurriedly left Borombyee, she was white as a sheet ; all her vivacity was gone. Her father looked at her inquiringly.

“ I have a headache, father, and could not sleep ; that’s all.”

Maggie came flying in, with her hair tossing over her eyes. “ What do you think ? ” she said ; “ Alec’s horse is gone ! he must have ridden away ! ”

“ What ! how’s this ? ” said her father.

“ I can only suppose,” said Maggie, “ that his toothache is worse, and he could not bear to stay to breakfast, so he went away.”

Elsie looked into her plate, and said nothing ; Maggie’s words stabbed her like a knife, and cut her to the quick. She knew that Alec’s pain was deeper seated than a tooth nerve. Her own feelings

at this moment told her how acutely he must have felt. She blamed herself entirely. She had not known what she was doing ; she was mad to act as she had done ; she had behaved abominably ; her sin had found her out.

Bond was full of sympathy, and said he was sorry and hoped the headache would soon go. A cup of tea would do her good ; then a rest in a dark room. He had never known what a headache was, but could feel for others, especially for Elsie. Yes, he was very sorry. Could he send her some smelling-salts, or anything else, from Mountfield. He would ride there and back in four hours. No, Elsie did not need anything ; rest would do her good. She drank some tea, then went to her room and lay down.

She heard her father and Bond ride away; then she rose and went to the hut, where she found Pat.

"Pat, please get my horse in, saddle him, and bring him to the door."

"Sure, Miss Elsie ! it's a gallop over the hills and far away that'll make the roses bloom on ye'r cheeks. Faix, Miss ! ye're loike a wax image o' the Blessed Vargin."

"Thank you, Pat."

She went to her room, put on her riding habit, then found Maggie and told her she was going for a gallop, as she did not feel well.

"Let me go with you, Elsie. I'll be company for you. It is so lonely to go by yourself. I don't like you to go alone."

"No, Maggie, I will go alone, and see whether I cannot shake off my headache. I would be no company for you. I would make you miserable. Besides, if father comes home to lunch he would miss you ; one of us must stay at home."

"Very well, Elsie ; but do not stay long."

Maggie did not like to see her sister go away alone. She felt that the headache was an excuse, and that there was deeper trouble. She was so sorry for her, and wished she could help her. If she could only send a message to Alec and bring him back, all would be well. She knew instinctively that Elsie and Alec loved each other, but were at cross purposes somehow. A word on either side would set things right. But how was it to be said ? She did not know.

Pat brought the horse to the end of the verandah,

and Elsie jumped on, with the help of a block of wood, which stood there for the purpose. Maggie held her sister's hand caressingly, and said, with a tear in her eye, "Come back soon, Elsie ; I shall be wearying for you till I see you."

Elsie went across the flat, over the bridge, and up the ranges. The breeze was cool and strong. She felt better already. The rapid motion banished thinking, but when she got to the steeper hills she fell back on her troubles again. Higher and higher she went, until she came to big boulders, fern-trees, and scrub. It was difficult to go up, but how would she get down again ? She did not care. Up ! up ! away ! as near the throne as she could, to pour out her soul to her Heavenly Father, and tell Him her trouble, and confess her fault.

At last, after the horse had scrambled and struggled by zigzag ways up some of the roughest hills of Victoria, he stopped, fairly exhausted, on a small tableland, surrounded by great rocks, some flat, some piled in huge fantastic shapes, like ancient ruins, with spaces left for doors and windows. To the south there was a gigantic valley, and all round the hillsides were masses

of stone, which had evidently been carried there in icebergs in some forgotten age, and stranded on this high sea beach. Stunted shrubs and wild oats drew a scanty subsistence here. A dingo was playing with her cubs at the mouth of her lair, unconscious of human presence ; a tiger-snake was sunning itself on a mossy stone ; lizards were darting to and fro ; an eagle was wheeling in mid-air over its nest of ragged sticks in a shattered tree that had braved many a storm ; and white clouds came flying past like ships in full sail.

Elsie noted all these things as the horse stood motionless for ten minutes. She urged him to go on, but he refused to move. She coaxed and petted him, but he would not make a step forward.

“ Poor fellow ! ” she said, “ I have pushed you too hard ; I was not thinking where we were going ; a climb like this was too much for you ; I’ll give you a rest.”

She jumped off his back, and tied the reins to the stirrups. He then began to nibble at the short, dry tufts of grass which shot up in hollow spots where drops of moisture had oozed out.

Elsie threw herself down on a flat rock, and

buried her face in her hands, weeping bitterly, and reproaching herself for driving Alec away while she had loved him all the time so much and so deeply. She would give her life to be reconciled—just to be able to meet him face to face and say, “Alec, forgive me!” Then she would willingly die. But to have no chance of telling him, to have no opportunity of asking his forgiveness, was more than she could bear. Oh, the agony of it all! Oh, how she had been punished for her heartless conduct! “Oh!” she cried, “winds and clouds and birds, carry a message to him, and tell him to come back, because I love him!”

Then she prayed, as she had never prayed before, and asked to be led and guided. For answer, a great peace filled her soul, and she seemed to hear the words, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

She sank back exhausted, and fainted away. How long she lay thus she never knew, but when she came to consciousness she was content to doze, or dream, or sleep for hours. When she came to herself the stars were shining and the moon was climbing the hills. She jumped up in alarm, and

tried to walk to where she had last seen the horse. She thought if she could only get on his back, he would be able to find his way home. She felt weak, and stumbled among the rocks with tottering, uncertain steps. She could not see the horse anywhere. He had evidently got tired of waiting for her, and had wandered away, or had gone to his accustomed paddock at the homestead.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Elsie did not come back in the afternoon, Maggie began to get anxious. She scanned the hills with a field-glass, hoping to see her coming home. Sometimes she saw a moving object, far away, but it was only a sheep. Sometimes a stone, or stump of a tree, would attract her attention, and, unaccountably, for a moment, simulate Elsie exactly ; but it was only a trick of the brain, a caprice of the imagination. As the shadows lengthened on the flats and the mists came out of the valley, Maggie could contain herself no longer, but ran out to Pat, and told him she was sure something had happened to her sister. She must have been thrown from her horse, and was perhaps lying up the hills, with broken bones ; or had lost her way, or been carried off for a ransom by bushrangers.

"Och, Miss Maggie!" said Pat; "she'll have paid a visit to Strathmona, an' been kep' by the young people till the cool av the evenin'. Let me see; it'll take four hours to ride quietly from Strathmona. Sure! Miss Maggie, never fear! they'll come home wid her. They'll come ridin' up like lords an' ladies to the castle walls, an' there'll be a moighty gran' banquet, an' they'll fut it on the flure, dresched in silks an' satins an' cloth av goold. Or mebbe a fairy prince has carried her away, an' married her beyant; an' they'll live happily ever afterwards."

"You need not laugh at me, Pat. I assure you I am very anxious. I am sure Elsie would never go by herself to Strathmona. I feel sure something has happened to her. Oh, I am so anxious! I wish father would come home!"

As she said these words a horse's hoofs were heard clattering over the little bridge.

"Here's father!" cried Maggie; and she set off running to meet him. She told him that Elsie had not come home, and, in a few words, explained in what direction she had gone.

Although McLean was slow of speech, he was

quick of action. What an active verb is in speech, he was among men.

"Maggie, send out every man at once. Tell them that's my order, and not to come home till she is found."

He turned his horse and galloped over the bridge and up the ranges as fast as he could make his steed go. In a few minutes his coo-ee was heard echoing among the hills.

Maggie called the men out of the hut and told them that her sister was lost, and that her father had ordered them to take their horses and scatter themselves over the north-western part of the run; "and be sure you don't come home till you find her," she said.

The horses were run into the yard in a few minutes. In the meantime four saddles were placed on the fence, and four men saddled-up and rode over the rail that Maggie had taken down.

She then went to the strangers' hut, and found two "sundowners," who had just come in as the sun was getting low.

"My sister is lost in the ranges," she said to

them; "and I want you to take letters to Mr. Keryle of Glengo, and Mr. Bond of Drumore, to ask them to come and help in the search. I want you to go at once."

"What, Miss! this minute? What'll ye give us?"

"Five shillings each as soon as you come back."

"Won't you give us a bit o' tucker first, an' a mossle o' baccer?"

"Yes."

She ran into the kitchen, and got a plate of bread and butter, which she took to the hut. Aggie followed with two pannikins of tea. Then Maggie went to her room, and hastily wrote two letters to Alec Keryle and Mr. Bond, telling them that Elsie was lost in the ranges, and asking them to come at once and help to search for her. Then she got two pieces of tobacco, and ran to the men.

"Here," she said to the nearest man, "is a letter for Mr. Keryle of Glengo. Give it into his own hand, and run every step of the way. Here is some tobacco." Then she gave a letter to the other man, addressed to Mr. Bond.

The men went on eating and drinking as if no life were at stake.

"Oh, go at once!" said Maggie; "there is no time to eat and drink."

"What, an' leave good wittals?" said the spokesman.

For answer she tore a newspaper in half, and wrapped some bread and butter in two parcels, which she thrust into the hands of the men, who took about two minutes to stand up. Each of them had his hand on his pannikin, lest it should be snatched from him. Then they slowly raised the tea to their lips, and drank it off at a draught. It was boiling hot, and left a red streak from the tip of the tongue all the way down.

"Oh!" they said; then rubbed their chests, rolled their eyes to the bark roof, swung their swags over their shoulders, and set off at a trot, one to the east, the other to the south.

"Be quick!" Maggie called after them.

"Now, Aggie, have plenty of hot water in the copper. Put the kettle on. Put a batch of bread in the oven, and make scones. Put three

or four joints to roast. I will send every man I can find to search, and when they come back they must be fed."

The two girls helped each other, and worked hard. In a short time their preparations were well forward. Every now and again a faint coo-ee was heard floating down the valley. The searchers were answering each other, and trying to let the lost girl know that she was being sought for. The cries came mournfully on the breeze, and made Maggie shudder. A coo-ee can be made joyful, hopeless, pathetic, funny—anything you please. It can say in a breath, "lost," "found!" And so the cries went on, in long drawn-out wails, until they died away altogether. Maggie did not recognise one hopeful note ; they all sounded like a dirge.

The two girls had a weary, sorrowful time. They watched together, wept together, comforted each other, listened, and waited. The night passed away somehow. Morning broke at last. There was no sign of the search being successful. No man returned.

About eleven o'clock Mr. Bond and two men

galloped up. The "sundowner" had delivered the letter about eight o'clock. After getting such information as he required from Maggie, Bond and the two men went away to add to the search party.

In a short time after they had gone Elsie's horse came up to the kitchen door. Maggie ran out.

"Oh, Hector!" she cried, clasping the horse round his neck. "Where is Elsie? How could you leave her? How could you desert her?"

Hector hung his head, and looked ashamed of himself.

"Good boy," said Maggie. "If I get on your back, will you take me to her?" Hector brightened up, as if he understood what she was saying.

"Bring me my hat, Aggie. I am going to jump on Hector, and look for Elsie. I think he will take me to her. She must have got off him of her own accord. She was not thrown. The bridle is tied through the stirrup just in the way she always ties it. She must have got off to rest, and something startled him, and he must have

run away and left her. Thank God, she is alive! She must be making her way home. She may have sprained her foot, and is coming slowly. We'll see her soon, I feel sure."

Maggie jumped on the horse, and Aggie tied her hat so as to keep it from flying away.

"Take me to her, good Hector, and be off," said Maggie. He bounded away, and they were soon a dot in the distance.

She was barely out of sight when Alec Keryle rode up with four men. Their horses were in a lather of foam with hard riding.

"What news, Aggie?"

"None, Mr. Keryle. They've all been out searching since last night. Her horse has just come home. Miss Maggie has jumped on him, and has gone out too. She thinks the horse will take her to where Miss McLean was when he left her. Miss Maggie has only a minute ago passed through that gap in the ranges. If you ride fast you may overtake her."

He touched his horse with the spur, and galloped away in Maggie's track, his four men following as quickly as they could.

Maggie's horse went on steadily, and steered for the hill he had climbed the day before ; but he avoided the steepest part, and went up an easy place which he had discovered when going home. He walked up and down the tableland as if looking for something. His rider was passive, and let him do as he pleased. He soon came to where Elsie had lain down, and he sniffed the ground. Maggie saw that the moss had been disturbed. "Good Hector, we are on the track," she said. Then the horse, with his nose held low, went on for half a mile, and suddenly stopped at a clump of bushes. Maggie gave a great cry, and jumped off. Her sister lay, pale as death, among the bushes. She breathed ! her pulse beat ! "Thank God, I have found her !"

Elsie muttered a few words, and Maggie stooped to listen. She distinctly heard her say, "Oh, Alec ! I'm sorry. Why did you go away ?"

Maggie stood up and filled her lungs, then gave a joyous and long-sustained coo-ee in a high soprano, which reverberated among the hills.

"Dod !" said McLean, "that's Maggie. She's found Elsie, God be praised !" And he rode off

at breakneck speed in the direction whence the coo-ee came.

"Holy Moses ! fwhat's that ?" said Pat, who had been beating along at the foot of the hill on the other side. "Miss Elsie's found herself, bedad ! an' here have I been sarchin' all noight, loike a shtuck pig, shquealin' out from toime to toime as if I wor hurt."

Pat gave a wild coo-ee, then whistled through his fingers with a shrill blast. Alec was the first to come up to Maggie, who was on her knees, chafing and rubbing her sister's hands. He knelt beside Elsie, pulled off her boots, and rubbed her feet till he felt a little glow come into them.

Her father then came. He took off his coat and wrapped it round her shoulders. In a short time, under their united efforts, a faint colour tinged her cheeks, and she soon opened her eyes ; but only for a moment, for she saw Alec, and shnt them. She thought she was dreaming.

She gradually regained her senses, and whispered, "Father ! Maggie ! Where am I ? What is the matter ? Am I hurt ?"

"No, no, darling ! you're not hurt. You are

in the arms of your own Maggie, and father is here. See, he is holding you up!"

Bond now arrived, and pressed forward. He had studied medicine for two years, but had never passed an examination, so he abandoned his intention of becoming a doctor.

"I'm a bit of a doctor, you know," he said. "I'll soon tell you all about the case. Let me see—let me see. Pulse a little weak; heart ditto." He moved her arms and legs gently. "How's that?" he said to her. "No bones broken? Any pain anywhere? How are we now?"

"I feel better," she said. "I must have fainted."

Alec could not bear to see Bond bending over Elsie, and pulling her about; so he withdrew behind a clump of saplings, and wondered what he could do. He could make a litter. The very thing! He ran to his horse, and took a tomahawk which swung in a leather case at his saddle and some rope. He soon cut down some saplings, and strapped them together with cross pieces, and piled on heaps of soft fern fronds. He had soon

made a comfortable litter in which to carry Elsie home. He saw that she was so weak she would be unable to sit on a horse.

When he had nearly finished the litter Pat came, and looked on.

"Shure it's the most sinsabilest thing that cud be done. It's a foine headpiece you've got entoirely, Masther Keryle. It's as saft as a fither bed, an' as aisy as a rockin'-chair ; fit for a princess av the blood, or a fairy queen, bedad !"

"You had better tell Mr. McLean, Pat, that this is the very thing to carry Miss McLean on. The best thing we can do is to take her home as quickly as possible."

"Faith, ye're about right, as ye mostly are, Masther Keryle."

Pat went away, whispered to McLean, and told him what Alec had prepared. McLean came and looked at the litter. "Bless ye, Alec !" he said.

The two men carried the litter and put it down beside Elsie ; then, with the help of Bond and Maggie, they laid her gently on the soft bed of ferns. The poor girl was perfectly passive, and

shut her eyes ; but she was conscious that Alec was near, though she dared not look him in the face.

McLean and Alec went to the head of the litter, Bond and Pat to the foot, and they carried Elsie slowly and carefully to Borombyee.

Bond went to the bookcase and took down the "Family Doctor," and consulted its pages, but could find no reference to any such case as Elsie's. "Confound it !" he said. " You never can find what you want to know in these books. If it had been toothache, scarlet fever, nettle-rash, rheumatism, or even headache, there are full directions ; but there is nothing here about a young lady lost in the bush, exposure to night air, fright, or shock to the system. Faugh ! These doctors are fools ; they never see a case of this kind. I'll fall back on first principles ; order complete rest, mustard poultice to the chest, chicken broth, and a couple of Holloway's pills night and morning. I'll pull her through ! "

He wrote full directions, and handed the paper on which they were written to McLean.

" I'll ride over to Mountfield, and bring Dr.

Rammage. I would like to have a consultation with him. You see, I, who have studied medicine and know as much as most doctors, can tell him all the symptoms from the time Miss McLean was found."

McLean nodded, and gave Bond's hand a warm grip.

"Very well," said Bond ; "I'm off as fast as my horse will carry me. Expect me by eight o'clock."

Meanwhile Elsie was undressed, and put to bed by Maggie's loving hands and Aggie's help ; then she drank a cup of tea and ate a little bread and butter.

"I feel better already, Maggie. Put your ear to my mouth. Is Alec here ?"

"Yes," said Maggie.

"Then don't let him go away."

"I'll take good care of that, Elsie."

Alec was informed by McLean that Elsie had gone to bed ; that she seemed better ; that the doctor had been sent for. He thought she only required rest.

"Then I'll say good-bye, for I am going to

Melbourne to-morrow. My mother will send over every day to inquire how Miss McLean is. I hope she will be quite well in a day or two."

Maggie's quick ears heard the sound of a horse's hoofs, and she started up in alarm, then ran out at the back door. Alec was just riding away.

"Alec!" she cried in an urgent voice.

He turned in his saddle, and looked at her earnest face for a moment; then he went to meet her. Putting her hand on the saddle, and looking up pitifully, with a tear in her eye, she said, "Alec, you mustn't go away! Do you want to kill Elsie?"

He put his hand to his forehead, while his heart thumped against his ribs.

"I do not understand," he said.

"I do, though! Elsie was so sorry when you went away angry with her. That's the cause of her illness. When I found her she was unconscious, but I heard her say, 'Oh, Alec! I'm sorry. Why did you go away?'"

"Maggie," he said, "you are my good angel come to help me. But for you I would have gone away wretched and miserable, and two lives would

have been wrecked. Now I am happy. Tell Elsie I shall not go away till she can see me."

"Oh, thank God ! all is well," said Maggie.

She ran to her sister, and whispered something in her ear which made her blush. She kissed Maggie, and said, " You are the dearest, sweetest sister in the whole world ! "

From that moment Elsie quickly recovered strength.

What is there more to tell ?

Only this. Two happy people met in the afternoon. The misunderstanding was gone for ever. A wedding, which was the talk of the countryside, took place in a few months.

THUNDER-AND-LIGHTNING

CHAPTER I

I JOINED the detective branch of the Victorian police in 1853, having just turned twenty-five at the time, standing five feet ten inches in my stockings, and without an ounce of superfluous flesh on my bones. Looking back, from a less height now, across the gulf of years, which has swallowed up many near and dear to me, I mentally see myself the beau-ideal of what a detective should be.

Our superintendent took stock of me, in his mind's eye, when he saw me first, and at once gave me some rough-and-tumble work to do (what I call rough-cast and rubble, having had some knowledge of the building trade) ; but when I tumbled I usually came out on the top, with a hard grip of the fellow below, who was only allowed to get up when I had decorated him with cuts and a pair of bracelets.

For some months I didn't get a word of praise from the superintendent. He expected a good deal from me, and I suppose got it. I had worked in Melbourne and in the country, on foot and on horseback, but I had still my spurs to win. My chance came through Governor La Trobe, who was a man, every inch of him.

There was a bushranger at this time who had been painting the country with blood, and who was more like the devil incarnate than any man I ever heard of. He was nicknamed "Thunder-and-Lightning"; why I never knew, but, I suppose, because there was a flash and roar from his Colt's revolver and his victim lay dead on the ground.

This man, or devil, had committed many murders with tigerish ferocity. He was the terror of more than one goldfield. Blood-curdling stories were told of him by the camp fire when the work of the day was done. He was execrated, and a reward of £500 was offered for his capture. The regular police did their best, I admit, but any man who was wanted gave them a wide berth when he saw their rig. They were a uniform failure. When they were about "Thunder-and-Lightning" took

a holiday, and played round the mountain-tops. Sometimes a splash or crack was seen or heard, when he was shooting in some almost inaccessible place, where rocks, trees, and scrub, in about equal proportions, hid him like a needle in a haystack.

When the police were as sick of him as the whale was of Jonah, they gave him up.

It was then the Governor took the matter in hand. He was a man who tried to manage all the Government departments with his own head and ten fingers, and did it well. Sir Charles heard of me, and said to our superintendent, when they were talking over the "Thunder-and-Lightning" case, "Try Wallace."

Now, my name happens to be Wallace, and I was christened William, after William Wallace the hero of Scotland ; a long way after, I grant you, but there's something in a name, although we fought in different fields.

Next morning the superintendent rang his bell, and told the messenger he wanted me.

"Shure ye're wanted," said Pat Kineen, the messenger.

"What for?" says I.

"Maybe for robbing a church, or stalin' a purse,
or worse, ye thafe o' the wurrld!"

"Do you know why there are no thieves in your
country, Pat?"

"Faith it's because ye're not there, Mister
Wallace."

"No! it's because there's nothing to steal."

"Well!" said Pat, "I'll tell yees what the
super wants yees for."

"What?"

"To go afther the biggest thafe of the wurrld.
Set a thafe to catch a thafe. There's a glimmer
o' sinse in the ould boy."

I hadn't an answer ready at the moment. I knew I was no match for Pat with the tongue, for his wit flashed out like summer lightning, and cut like a Damascus blade. I did not wait for anything further, but knocked at the superintendent's door and went in.

He took me by storm at once with his hook nose and eagle eyes, and expected me to quake in my shoes and turn white; but I raked him across the bows with my two black eyeballs, and he was glad to pull down his sky-scrapers pretty quick.

"His Excellency the Governor wants to see you, detective, at a quarter to eleven sharp. Good morning!"

This nearly took the wind out of my sails, but I managed to steady myself, and said, "Any complaint, sir?"

"No! a great compliment."

I shut the door very softly, and sailed away, feeling rather important, and never once looking at Pat, who was ready to open fire on me.

When I was outside I glanced at my watch, and found I had five minutes to spare, so I walked leisurely to the Government offices, which were then in William Street. Just as I reached the gate the Union Jack was hoisted, to show that the Governor had arrived.

I told the orderly that I had an appointment with His Excellency, and gave my name. I was ushered in at once. No red tape to speak of in those days, only in retail quantities, not wholesale, as now.

His Excellency received me very kindly, and, I believe, would have shaken hands with me if the *aide-de-camp* hadn't fixed his glass eye on

him, as much as to say, "It isn't etiquette, you know."

Well, Sir Charles said he had been keeping his eye on me for some time, had made up his mind that I was the man for Galway, and that he wanted to entrust me with the most important case that had ever sprung up during his term of office.

I felt about six feet six for the moment, and expected him to say that he wanted me to carry secret despatches to Downing Street.

However, I soon learned the kind of despatches he meant. He wanted me to despatch "Thunder-and-Lightning" to Queen Street, or be despatched myself to the Golden Street of the New Jerusalem. It did not seem to me that he cared very much whether we were both despatched, so long as he made sure of "Thunder-and-Lightning."

I braced myself up when I had taken bearings, and looked steadily at the Governor. I declare, I thought I saw in one eye Nelson's motto, "England expects every man to do his duty," and in the other eye the words of Burns' song, "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled."

I felt equal to anything then, and said, "Your

Excellency, I pledge you my solemn word I'll produce the body of 'Thunder-and-Lightning,' dead or alive, within three months."

"I am glad to hear you say so, detective," he said ; "and what is more, I believe you."

He pulled out of his pocket a sheet of foolscap, which gave a full description, in his own writing, of the bushranger, his friends and haunts. Then he showed me the drawing of a house in Collingwood, which had been sent to him, with the information that it was the exact outline of a place "Thunder-and-Lightning" was coming to, out of bravado, in a few days.

I looked at the drawing believing I would recognise it, for I prided myself on knowing every house frequented by disreputable characters in Melbourne, and I had daguerreotyped them on my brain.

"I know this house!" I said.

"I see my confidence in you is not misplaced; good morning. The watchword is 'Down.' "

I saw I was dismissed, so I said, "Good morning, your Excellency," and went away.

I felt much elated thus to be singled out for

such an important duty, and determined to do or die.

There was a rumour in the air that "Thunder-and-Lightning" was coming to Melbourne, in his dare-devil way, to give the citizens a taste of his quality. He had an overweening conceit of himself, and thought he was a match for all the police in the country.

I went down to the office and reported to the superintendent the duty I was entrusted with. He gave me *carte-blanche*; then I went home to efface myself, which I effectually did by putting on a false beard, staining my eyebrows, and dressing myself like a digger.

When I had completed my disguise to my entire satisfaction, I felt my face flush like the red stripe in the French flag, then white like the next stripe, then I looked very blue indeed. I was a regular chameleon, and never felt like this before. The cause of all this was the sudden remembrance of the last words the Governor said to me, "The watchword is 'Down.'" It was a conundrum. I gave it up.

CHAPTER II

I HAPPENED to be lodging in the house of Mrs. Smith, an old widow, whom I had known in Scotland. I came and went just as I liked, having a key of the front door. I managed to keep my occupation very dark. When I was new to the trade I thought of telling the landlady who I was, for she was a discreet body; but I remembered just in time that women's tongues are hung on so fine a balance they cannot help wagging and flopping out any secret—being anxious to unload and take in fresh cargo. If they have no better listeners, they will whisper to a bird of the air, or the four winds. I come from too far north to trust a woman with a secret, so I did not tell Mrs. Smith I was a detective. There is only one woman I tell secrets to, and that is my wife. If I did not tell her, she would get them out of me, so I make

a virtue of necessity. Confession is good for the soul.

It began to rain cats and dogs, or more like elephants and rhinoceroses, for it came down heavy. The street gutters ran like rivers, and joined each other in the middle of the road, shaking hands, bobbing, courtesying, and carrying all the floatable rubbish to the Yarra. The only living things I saw were half a dozen fowls of some sort, splashing themselves and ducking in the water. The windows were so blurred I could not make out what they were till I heard them say "Quack!" "A fine day," I said to myself, "for ducks, geese, and detectives." The wetter the day the surer you are of your game. It lies close on such days, and one may expect a feast of contentment when one knows it is spitted with a broad arrow on back, hip, or thigh, simmering in the jug—I mean gaol. Jugged hare, shall we say?

I determined to go out, so I put on an india-rubber coat and boots. I had never seen a detective with an umbrella, therefore I took one with me as an extra disguise and crept down stairs. The maid-of-all-work had stopped half-

way, and had a pail in her hand when I came upon her unawares. She took a hasty glance at me, then fled two steps at a jump, dropping the pail at the bottom. Then she threw her apron over her head, and played blindman's-buff, till she lumbered into the kitchen and fell all of a heap.

I heard Mrs. Smith say, in a voice of alarm, “What is the matter, Mary Ann?”

There was a dead silence; Mary Ann had fainted.

I took steps—down the rest of the stairs—to make myself scarce before Mary Ann came to, so I shut the door quietly, and marched rapidly up the street, with my head buried in the umbrella. The wind nearly carried my beard away, but I held fast, and tacked to the lee side, where I made good progress. Then I walked up La Trobe Street, and made my way, across the open space, towards Collingwood.

In a quarter of an hour I was in the neighbourhood of the house I was looking for, so I called a council of war with myself, and came to a unanimous decision as to what I should do. I

ran a parallel up to the place, took a flying survey through a little hole in the umbrella, and passed on ; then I twirled the hole round, and took a squint at the other side of the street. Nearly opposite the house I had looked at was one with a bill in the window, on which was “ HOUSE TO LET.” Just as Wellington took possession of the house of *La Haye Sainte* on the Field of Waterloo, so would I take possession of this empty domicile for strategic purposes. Two great minds may hit upon the same idea.

I turned into another street, and went down a right-of-way to the back of the empty house. Fortunately I found the gate open, so I went into the yard. It was a squalid place, full of water, dreary and wretched in the extreme. The door was locked, and the windows were latched. Should I get in at the door or window ? As I usually travel by the shortest road, I thrust my hand through the glass, pulled the catch back, threw the sash up, put my leg over the sill, then jumped into the room, which was about twelve feet square. The floor was blotched and greasy, the walls damp and frowsy, with great strips of

paper hanging down at the ceiling. I shut the window, but left it unfastened, then unlocked the door, and opened it a few inches to leave a way of retreat in case of need. If worsted by the enemy (which may happen to the best general), retreat in good order, like Sir John Moore at Corunna, who was covered with glory, a mantle, and Westminster Abbey ; or if not by the latter, he ought to have been.

I explored the four rooms, baton in hand—there was not a soul in the place ; then I stood at one of the front windows, a little way back, and reconnoitred. The rain had ceased. Black masses of cloud were hurrying up from the south, and clawing at the chimney-pots. The wind howled in the *lum*, and whistled through the key-hole. The weatherboard walls creaked and groaned like a ship's timbers in a gale. The front gate swung on its one hinge, and grated on the gravel path. Rank weeds filled the strip of garden, and the paling fence clattered like castanets, without tune, rhyme, or reason.

I had barely noted what I have set down, when the door of the opposite house was opened a few

inches, and a black eye, like a search-light, flashed to right and left. Evidently the coast was clear, and the sweep satisfactory, for the other eye hove in sight, accompanied by a face in perfect drawing and colouring, such as Sir John Millais or Marcus Stone loves to paint.

“ Sold again ! ” I said to myself ; “ this is a lady and no mistake ! ” I was just about to beat a retreat, cover up my tracks, destroy my bridges, burn my boats, or whatever is the appropriate expression, under my crushing defeat. I ground my teeth with chagrin and hunger. It was nearly six o’clock, and in another hour it would be dark. I had no stomach for such work under the unforeseen circumstances that had developed.

The lady had a basket on her arm, which gave my thoughts a new direction. She must be on a charitable mission to the reprobate sweep who lived there, trying to whitewash him with tracts, and sweeten his life with sugar and tea. “ This is the solution of the situation, no doubt,” I thought. I must not desert my post, but watch. Putting my theory into practice, I glued my eyes on the lady to see what was her next move. She

came out on the step, and furtively peered up and down the street with an anxious face. First impressions are not always best. I did not like her looks half so well as I did. She did not improve on closer inspection. However, everything suffers on a wet day. Beauty does not count for much, and classical features are nowhere muffled in a hood and dripping umbrella. Helen of Troy and Cleopatra did not show themselves on a rainy day.

She pulled a shawl over her head, and hid her face as well as she could, then shut the door, and walked up the street, glancing over her shoulder every second or two.

“ You are no better than you ought to be,” I thought. “ Like a fair apple without, but with rottenness at the heart—a whitened sepulchre, with foulness within. There is some secret here ! ”

I had changed my mind about her. She was better than her surroundings ; her dress was costlier than the neighbourhood could buy. She was a false coin, which would not stand the test of a ring.

When she turned the corner of the street I let

myself out by the front door, and followed her, my umbrella acting as a screen. When I reached the corner of the street she had vanished. There was a public-house a hundred yards away, into which she might have gone, so I went to it, and glanced into the bar over the frosted half of the window. A man was sitting on a barrel, playing on an asthmatical accordion, so wheezy and broken-winded it could not get through more than three bars of a tune without a rest. Three men, with pewter pots before them, were thumping some knotty arguments into a table. The lady wasn't there, evidently, so I went on, but seeing the private door ajar, I pushed it open a few inches. A jar suggests a pot of something. I was about to go in when I pulled myself up, just in time, for the lady was at a little square hole in the wall which communicated with the bar, and at that moment was slipping a bottle into her basket. On second thoughts, after watching for an opportunity, I went into the passage, and then into the parlour as if I were walking between eggs. The plot was developing. It was hatching.

In a few minutes the lady had bought what

she wanted and went away, with me at her heels. I nearly trod on her skirt, so eager was I to keep her in sight. She did not go in the direction of the house she had first left, but went farther from it, probably to make more purchases. When she was at a safe distance I followed. There she turned into a shop, which I knew was a grocer's when I saw some soap boxes on the pavement, and a swinging sign with a big T and a teapot on it, so that the lettered might read and the unlettered might see what was sold within. A grocer's shop is like a salmon basket, having only one way out. Not like a public-house, whose ways in and out are many and crooked. The lady must come out sometime, so I could wait. I went into a right-of-way, and showed about a hair-breadth of my right eye in the direction of the shop.

When my patience was nearly all jettisoned I heard the sharp ting of a bell, and the lady came out of the shop. She was coming my way. I suddenly became absorbed in searching for an imaginary copper, which any one might suppose I was groping for in the gutter; my

back toward the mouth of the right-of-way, my big body sticking in its gullet, my head nearly touching the water, while my telescopic eyes watched between my ankles for the transit of Venus.

When the blood had all run to my head, and my heart was throbbing like a water-lifter, the lady made her appearance, and gave a start when she saw me in this extraordinary attitude. She stared and better stared, and would have looked me out of countenance if there had been more of it visible. I was in a downright dilemma. When she had satisfied her curiosity she went on, and I slowly became an upright detective, or as nearly so as the business will allow.

I reached the end of the right-of-way as quickly as I could, and looked down the street, expecting to see the woman (I drop the term lady, for I was beginning to take her down a peg), but did not see her. She could not have reached the corner at a walking pace. She must have run like the wind. Perhaps she thought I was a madman, and would chase her.

"All right," I said, "I can run as fast as you,"

so I stretched myself, like a piece of india-rubber, and bounded along till I drew myself in at the corner. She was nowhere to be seen. There wasn't a figure in the landscape. She was rubbed out of the drawing—erased, by Jove!

CHAPTER III

I WAS done! Given away! Sold by a woman!

There was nothing for it now. If I were to stand here gazing about, perhaps she would be gloating over my defeat from some friendly window, so I walked away, passing the house I had been watching, and scanning each window closely. No living thing was visible. I did not stop a second, did not hesitate, but went straight to the back of the house I had entered so unceremoniously a short time before. I walked in, feeling metaphorically like a whipped hound, with ears down and tail between his legs. The house was now as gloomy as I was. I groped my way to the front window, and looked across the street.

Just at that moment a flash of lightning leaped out, and fell like a flaming sword ; then a peal of thunder tore the clouds, with a deafening crash, as if they were made of sheet-iron. The fiend incarnate, in the shape of the woman who had slipped through my fingers, stood at the door of the opposite house, with a simper on her mouth, as if butterine wouldn't melt in it.

I had a big oath ready, and it nearly hissed out on the hob, hot and strong ; but, as I had been brought up on porridge and the Shorter Catechism, I did not give rein to profanity, so just pulled up in time to prevent a moral smash. Besides, an oath to be effective must have two or three witnesses.

I believe that—blank woman knew I was looking at her, for she simpered and smiled like one o'clock on Christmas Day. I only saw her for a second, but the sight burned into my brain. If there is ever a *post mortem* on me, the scar will be found. After the sudden flash the blackness of darkness swallowed up house, woman, and everything. I never saw night put up the shutters so early for the time of year.

"‘Thunder-and-Lightning’ has been warned,” said a voice close to my left shoulder.

“Angels and ministers of grace defend us!” I said under my breath. “Who’s there?” I called in my loudest and boldest manner.

“Down,” said the voice.

This was the watchword the Governor gave me. I had forgotten it. It seemed years since I heard it.

“Who speaks, and what is your news?” I said, feeling sure a friend was near.

“I am the Lieutenant-Governor. I came to tell you that ‘Thunder-and-Lightning’ has been warned, and that his movements are known. He is in Melbourne, but will shun the house as if it had the plague. The woman you saw just now is at the bottom of it all. I am afraid she has found out something.”

I was never so much astonished in all my life. You might have knocked me down with a humming-bird’s feather; but I quickly recovered possession of myself, and struck a match, which I held up in the face of the speaker. I did not know it. The match went out.

"Hold this dark-lantern for a moment, and look at me," said the man. "Now flash it on me."

He was the quintessence of conscientiousness. He had got some information, through an underground channel, and he had come in search of me. He had seen me when I ran after the woman, and had followed me cautiously. It was done in a masterly way, for I did not see a soul in the road. He was a born detective, which is the highest praise I could give. The Queen never had a better representative. Perhaps he tried to do too much. He wanted to bat, bowl, field, and keep wickets in every game. If he had been captain of a ship, he would have tried to do duty also as first, second, and third mate, steward, cook, carpenter, and able-bodied seaman.

When I had looked at him steadily for a minute, I dropped the lantern, and said, "I'm blowed!" The wind was taken out of my sails and no mistake! When I recovered myself a bit, I waited for His Excellency to speak, but he did not say a word. Feeling the silence awkward I spoke again.

"Has your Excellency anything further to say?"

There was no reply. I ventured to put out my hand to where he had been standing, and grasped a handful of air. I spoke again, and groped about, then held up the lantern. He wasn't in any of the rooms. He had gone as noiselessly as he had come. Chingahgook could not have vanished more silently. I was left to my own resources.

I wasn't going to stay any longer in this mouldy, rat-riddled, mouse-eaten house. I couldn't breathe or think, so I went into the open air, turned down the right-of-way, and into the street where the suspected house stood. As I passed it I flashed the lantern on the door, and saw a chalk mark like a streak of forked lightning. I perceived at a glance that this was a preconcerted sign for "Thunder-and-Lightning" to give the house a wide berth and vanish.

I thought I heard a laugh behind the window as I passed, but I suppose it was all imagination. The laugh was against me, of course. I was in no laughing mood. I went on, and hadn't reached the corner of the street, when I determined to have

another look at the place. I had got half-way to it, when a moving mass of women's clothes passed me, and a voice came out of the bundle.

"Wallace, does your mother know you're out?"

This stung me to madness. I made a grab at the millinery, but it was gone. I heard a silvery laugh somewhere. It might have come from the middle of the road, an upstairs window, the top of a chimney, or other unlikely place, for anything I knew in the state of frenzy I was in. I made a dash down the road, but might as well have looked for a needle in a haystack. I found a big D—between my teeth, but I swallowed the other three letters with a gulp, and cursed inwardly.

My mother didn't know I was out; but I did, and was sick of the business. I had been too confident. There was nothing more to be done that night, for the game had got wind of me somehow.

I slipped my baton up my sleeve, and turned to go home. The streets were deserted and dark, save for a faint patch of light under an oil-lamp, which flickered and glistened on the wet ground. In a short time I had left the houses behind, and walked across the open space between Collingwood and the

gaol, striking into a narrow path which many feet had trodden hard ; it wound here and there between pools of water. There was just width enough for two persons to walk abreast, and there was only sufficient light for me to see the grey strip of solid ground stretching in front. I had arrived a little to the west of the gaol walls, when the moon began to show herself in the rifts of the driving clouds.

A figure loomed up ahead of me, about a hundred feet away. It came nearer and nearer, when I saw it was a man. I prepared to go to the right so as to let him pass, when he suddenly presented a pistol at my head, and said, in a blood-red whisper, "Your money or your life!" I brought up my right hand, with the forefinger thrust out like the barrel of a pistol, while my other fingers were doubled up, and shouted, "I'll shoot you, you scoundrel!" At the same time I knocked the fellow's pistol-hand up with a rapid blow. A deafening report followed, and a ball grazed the top of my head. The moon shone out full on the man's face. He had blazing black eyes, a broken nose, and the scar of an old cut down his left cheek. As soon as he fired, he darted off with the speed of a deer at

right angles to the path, and I heard him floundering in the water. I was in pursuit in a moment, although I thought my head was ploughed with the ball, and had got a top-dressing of bone dust, which would bring up a crop of troubles.

The moon withdrew herself. The landscape was a blank once more. I was to draw no prizes to-night apparently. The would-be murderer was swallowed up in the darkness. I went hither and thither searching for him, but soon found I had lost my bearings; so I retraced my steps as well as I could, till I struck La Trobe Street, then went to my lodgings, let myself in, and crept up to my room.

When I lit the candle a thought flashed into my brain with electric speed. I stood dazed ; then brought my right hand down on the dressing-table with such terrific force as to ruin the whole box-and-dice in a moment ; the legs snapped ; there was a crash, and the looking-glass was smashed into a hundred pieces.

The man who fired at me was no other than "Thunder-and-Lightning." The Governor had described him exactly in the paper he had given me.

In another minute I was in the street, and

running like a madman. Before midnight I had visited every police station in Melbourne, and had given a description of the man. At daylight fifty eyes were watching for him on the main exits from the town.

CHAPTER IV

NEXT morning the *Argus* reported that a man had been found dead on a vacant piece of ground near the gaol ; that several robberies had been effected by an armed man ; and that money, to a large amount, had been stolen. A description of the man was given, which proved to me that he was no other than “Thunder-and-Lightning.” There was much excitement in the city ; but the climax was reached when it became known, soon after ten o’clock, that the manager of a suburban bank had been found on the premises, gagged, and bound hand and foot. He told an extraordinary story. He had been awakened in the middle of the night by a man, who held a pistol to his ear, and told him that he would be instantly shot if he made the slightest noise. The manager discovered that his arms were already

bound by a stout rope, and that he was powerless to resist. Another man came and gagged him, then tied his legs.

The robbers found the key to the safe, and effected an entrance. To their intense disgust they only got about £200 in notes (chiefly tens), £25 in gold, and a little silver. Seeing there was no more money, one of the men gave the manager a blow with the butt end of a pistol, which stunned him. When he recovered the men had decamped. He gave me a description of them, and "Thunder-and-Lightning" was one, without doubt.

I felt very small, for the scoundrel had been within my grasp, and I had let him slip. I made a vow that I would hunt him down and take his life, or lose my own in the attempt.

I obtained a search-warrant, and proceeded to the house I had been watching the night before, picking up three policemen in plain clothes at the local office, and directing two of them to go to the back of the house, while I, with the other man, went to the front. I knocked several times, but got no answer. Then I tried the door ; it gave to my touch and flew open. When I let the men in at

the back, we searched the place, and found the bird had flown. Looking out of a window, I saw there was a lane running from the public-house I had visited the previous night to the place where I was. Some incidents of yesterday were unravelling.

Leaving the three men, I went out by the front way, and walked to the public-house open and above-board, as bold as brass. I strolled into the parlour, and rang the bell. A frowsy little boy of about twelve years answered my call. He had a pasty face, snub nose, big mouth, greenish eyes, and red hair. I knew a face the very image of it, but I could not remember where I had seen it.

“Did you ring, mate?” the boy said.

“Yes, I’ll take a glass of colonial ale.”

“All right,” he replied, and went away to get it.

Now he had not been gone a minute, when I suddenly remembered whose face he was the image of. He was as like Pat Kineen, our messenger, as two split peas are like each other. I heard him coming back.

“Your name might be Kineen?” I said.

“It is that same, shure!”

“And the other name may be Patsy?”

"Shure, you've hit the bull's-eye ! It is."

I had made a bold guess. I said, "I've come from your father. He and I are chums."

"An' what may you want wid me ?"

"I want you to take me to a man who is staying here. I know his name, but I was to ask for a man with a big scar on his face."

"I wasn't to tell anybody who didn't give the word."

"Ah, ah ! I see. 'Mum' is the word."

"Faith, ye've got it ! 'Mum' is the word an' no mistake."

I had stumbled on the right word. The combination had opened the lock.

"Well, take me to him as quick as you can."

"It isn't a him : it's a she. He's gone, he has, this morning."

"Well, take me to her, then. I'm a friend."

I slipped a shilling into his hand, and he led the way, muttering, "You're a gintleman."

He went to the top of the stair, I following, ready to grab him if he tried to bolt. He stopped at a door in a dark passage, and knocked three times, then whispered, "Mum."

The door opened at once. I grasped two hands, and said, "How are you?" then slipped a pair of handcuffs over a woman's wrists.

I went inside and locked the door. I was in a regular trap, for I felt convinced there were some desperate characters in the house who would not stick at a trifle. There was not a moment to lose, so I dragged the woman to the window, threw the sash open, and whistled three times. My men popped their heads out of the door of the house I had left them in, saw me, and came up the lane at a rapid run.

In the meantime the woman screamed and alarmed the house. The door was burst open; a man rushed in and threw himself upon me. Just then, however, my three men ran forward and secured him in a trice.

I had made a haul. The net result was I had caught two fish that were worth catching. I am actually trying to make a pun, which is excusable, as my success was great. For the last twenty-four hours I had been as hard-faced as a dissenting chapel. There hadn't been a smile in me. The game was whist. There wasn't a "joker" in the

pack. It was my deal now. I had turned up an honour, and had some good trumps in my hand.

The woman was the one I had followed the night before, and the man was the accomplice of "Thunder-and-Lightning" in the bank robbery. Notes were found in their possession, which were proved by the numbers to have been some of the stolen ones.

The prisoners were lodged in the nearest police station, much to my satisfaction. I walked away on the tips of my toes, and with my head held high. There was exhilaration in the air, and I felt as if I had swallowed a "pick-me-up."

As I returned to the office the conversation I had with Pat Kineen came fresh into my memory. How did he know I was "to go afther the biggest thafe of the wurld" I should like to know? and why was his son acting as potboy in the hotel? Then Patsy's unguarded admissions pointed to something not yet cleared up. Pat had been got at. I had a bone to pick with him, and I would get into the marrow, so I gnawed away at it, ruminated over it, and digested it.

When I arrived at the office I saw that Pat had

had some information of what had taken place. He was trying to hide something. His face looked scared and his hands shook.

“ It’s a beautiful day, Pat.”

“ Illigant indade, Misther Wallace,” he said, with a curious shake in his voice.

I knocked at the chief’s door, went in and shut it, then said in a whisper, “ I suspect Pat Kineen of a crime, and wish to arrest him.”

“ Good heavens ! what’s the matter ? ”

“ I believe he is at the keyhole now.”

I went on tiptoe and put my eye to the hole. A pupil, with anxious inquiry, was trying to solve a problem on the other side. I opened the door and pulled it with all my force. As I expected, Pat fell sprawling into the room.

“ What is all this ? ” said the chief, starting up in a rage.

“ This,” said I, as cool as a water-melon at four in the morning, “ is Pat Kineen, the companion of thieves and a sharer of the plunder.”

“ Och ! ” said Pat. “ Oi was just clanin’ the door-handle whin Misther Wallace pulled me into the room as I was hangin’ on to it.”

" You'll hang higher than that, Pat, if you don't take care," I said.

" Go away, Pat," said the chief, " and don't hang on to door-handles and get so suspiciously near keyholes again."

" Oh no ! " I said ; " I arrest him in the Queen's name for being a companion of thieves, and assisting 'Thunder-and-Lightning' to escape."

" Be careful what you are doing, Wallace ! " said the chief.

" Oh, I am very careful ! " I said ; " I've got a tight grip of him."

" The devil take him ! " yelled Pat. " If I'd a blackthorn I'd shplit his head wid it."

" Would you kindly see what Pat was hiding in his drawer ? " I said to the chief.

He went at once, Pat and I following.

" In that corner," said I, pointing to the left-hand side.

" Here is a £10 note," said the chief.

" What is the number ? "

" 21,105."

" Whist ! " said Pat to me ; " don't tell an' I'll give you fifty pounds."

I paid no heed to him, but said, "That is one of the notes stolen from the bank."

"Me mother's first cousin's sister's son," said Pat, stammering wildly, "giv' me that for change av a sovereign this marnin'!"

"You'll get your change in your sovereign's gaol for three years, note that!" I said. I can't help making a pun or two when I'm in high spirits, even if they are bad ones. I was elated with my success, and no mistake. This is the only excuse I have.

I may as well say here that the woman was found guilty of receiving some of the stolen notes. The man I arrested in the hotel was found guilty of robbing the bank. It was proved that Pat had warned "Thunder-and-Lightning," and had been rewarded by getting a share of the stolen money. Heavy sentences were passed upon them, with hard labour.

This was my first big case. I was complimented on all sides, and got promotion with a good salary tagged on.

CHAPTER V

WELL, “Thunder-and-Lightning” was too quick for us. He had flashed on the town, shot his bolt, and disappeared. For two months the criminal outlook was clear. I had nothing to do but take a survey of the horizon in the morning, and an observation at noon. There were no outbursts of murder or robbery. “Thunder-and-Lightning” was lying low. I knew he would break out some day.

One morning I received secret intelligence that he had been seen in the Puzzle ranges, near the Strathbogie country. This was enough for me. I scented the battle afar off. I happened to be reading at the time, but I threw down my book at once, and got instructions to go to the front without delay. In about two hours I had rigged myself up as a digger. A digger’s signboard

at that time was made up of a pair of moleskin trousers, a blue "jumper," a pair of heavy boots, and a slouch hat. With a swag over my shoulder, I made my way to the coach office about five o'clock in the afternoon. The coach by which I proposed to go was just driving up.

"Hullo, old fellow!" said an acquaintance of mine. "Off to the diggings?"

"Yes, I'm going to have a try."

"So long then; wish you luck."

Having bought a ticket, I took an inside seat, not caring to advertise myself in big letters on the front page. I might as well be under the gaze of the hundred eyes of the *Argus* as sit and be conned like a book by every passer-by. When a coach trundles along any one who runs, or walks, may read.

I pulled my hat over my eyes, and settled myself as if I meant to take a sleep. This attitude disarms criticism, and provokes contempt. A good imitation of a snore decides the business. The sleeper is either a fool or drunk.

The coach went down the street as far as the post-office, and stopped to take the mails. In a

few minutes we were round the corner, and bowling up Elizabeth Street at the rate of ten miles an hour, going into a rut occasionally, like diving into the trough of the sea, for the roads were uncommonly bad in those days. The passengers bumped about, and cannoned off each other like bowls on a green, amid much laughing. It was lively! I smiled between the snores. We soon got used to the motion, and timed ourselves, as a rider does on a trotting horse.

About every fifteen miles, as I judged, we changed horses, and went on with a fresh spurt. Sometimes the coach would travel on one wheel for a second or two, or on one side, then on the other. Then we travelled, for an hour or more, on level ground, and would suddenly skid, with the break on, down a steep hill, in and out among the rocks, to the bottom, and then slowly labour up the next rise.

About ten o'clock we stopped at a wayside inn. Some one called out, "Supper." There was no need to announce it. It announced itself with a nasal effect. The nose had the news first. The air was full of it, shouting "onions."

Everybody but myself went to supper. I wouldn't show myself in the fierce glare of the kerosene lamps; so I sat where I was, pulled out my sandwich case, and had a square meal, then washed it down with a swig of brandy and water.

In half an hour the passengers clambered to their seats, the driver shouted, "All aboard!" cracked his whip, and we were off. It was black as pitch, the road was sticky, the air clammy, and the coachman looked like the Wild Huntsman careering to the bottomless pit. I had had enough make-believe sleep, and was very wide awake. I peered through the curtain and looked out. It was a blindman's holiday. We came to a steep pinch, and the horses stopped. All the men were ordered to get down and walk. It was a relief to stretch one's legs, so I went ahead, and the rest of the passengers lumbered behind. Some of them were soon blown in trying to keep pace with the horses. When the band begins to march you must keep up with it, or you'll lose the music. When the coach stopped at the top of the hill three men were missing,

but they soon came up, and we went on again. The dreary night died by inches ; I thought the day would never dawn. When it came, dancing over the mountains, I retired behind my hat.

About noon we arrived at the town of Benalla. This was as far as I was going by coach, so I got down at the hotel where the horses were changed. Here I got a wash and a good dinner.

I went into the town, with my swag on my back, and steered a southerly course towards the mountains. A young woman, who had lost nearly all her teeth, and hadn't sense enough to keep her mouth shut, showed me the Mansfield road, and told me that some rich diggings had been discovered near Pepper Hill. I promised to give them a try.

The road was as intricate as a railway guide. Branch tracks switched off here and there, and wandered about till they were bogged or "bushed." Noble red gum-trees scented the air. A pastoral symphony was performed by an orchestra of magpies, laughing jackasses, and cockatoos. Kingfishers flashed like jewels ; parrots, clad in rainbows, chattered ; the whip-bird cracked his thong,

and made the forest ring ; native bears placidly stared ; bees and honey-suckers were competing for cargo in the same line.

It was a peaceful scene. I was quite enchanted, and would willingly have abandoned the enterprise for the life of the simple farmer, whistling at the plough or calling the cattle home. Should I return in peace with the trophies of war, or leave my bones to bleach in the sun and wind until the last trump shall echo among the mountains ?

I had been walking for some hours, when I saw, away to the left, a long, low house nestling among trees. I jumped over a bush-fence, and took a straight aim for a chimney that blew a wreath of smoke out of its pipe. The sun was going down. The birds were settling themselves in bed, and tucking their heads among the feathers.

When I at last scrambled down to the broad flat that stretched away to the Broken River, I suddenly found myself among a number of cows and big calves, which skipped about on the smallest number of legs there is any record of. The economy of nature is surprising. A little goes a long way.

A dog on three legs is nothing to what I saw. I was rather scared when they came round me to stare. Like country folks, they were inquisitive, and wanted to know what I was fooling around for.

Just then a man, with a limp in his left leg, and a crooked stick in his right hand, came up. This was old Sailor Tom, as I found out afterwards, who was driving the cattle home to milk. I gave him a civil "Good evening."

"Good evening, mate," said Tom. "D'ye come from the new diggin's? Some says as there's lumps o' goold there as big as me 'ead; other some it's a 'shicer.'"

"No," I said; "but I'm goin' there. D'ye think ye'r boss would gi'e me a bed?"

"Oh yes," said Tom, "he'll find ye a bed if ye can find the sleep, that's fair. Ye see the strangers' hut has had the kangaroo dogs in it, so the population's lively an' aboundin'. The fleas is in possession of the field after the last bloody battle wi' a 'sundowner,' when he went to bed an' board there. I found 'im in the mornin', like a water-logged ship, sinkin' fast, wi' the whole crew workin'

hard at the pumps, and suckin' away for bare life."

"An' what became o' the man ?" I said.

"Oh ! we just towed 'im away, an' patched 'im up. 'Ee vowed 'ee wouldn't cruise on this station no more ; says 'ee, 'This 'ere station's too 'eavily stocked, an' the breed too lively to my fancy.'"

I determined to give the strangers' hut a wide berth, for one flea in bed is one too many for me.

Sailor Tom began to laugh when he saw my glum looks, and said, "Ye can spread ye'r blankets in the spare bunk in my hut. That's it," pointing to a low slab building with a bark roof. "Jist go up there ; I'll be wi' ye in a jiffy when I've done milkin'. Get up, Polly!"

I went to the hut, and finding a rough bench at the door, sat down to rest after my long walk. Tom proved a kindly soul ; he brought me a big pannikin of tea, a chop, and a piece of bread. After a good meal I turned into the bunk, and was soon fast asleep.

Somewhere about two in the morning I awoke with a start. The clattering of a horse's hoofs was heard passing close to the hut, and a wild halloo

rattled the loose window-pane, and echoed from the hill. To my astonishment, another halloo burst out from powerful lungs close to my ear.

"Dang it!" said Sailor Tom, "ain't that a stretcher for the windpipe. 'Ope 'ee 'eard it."

"Who?" I said.

"I'm blest! then you don't belong to them parts? That's 'Thunder-an'-Lightnin's' signal to me w'en 'ee goes by across our ford; an' I answers 'im."

"An' what for?" says I.

"As much as to say there's no bobbies aroun'; do you twig?"

"I twig," said I. "'An where's he off to now?"

"To the Dead Horse diggin's for sarten. I can 'ear 'is 'orse's 'oofs clatterin' up the track."

"Wish he hadn't wakened me out o' a sound sleep."

"I tell ye there's music in 'is voice, an' money too; beats the Hightalian Hopera to fits!"

"Do you say so?" says I. "D'ye think he's in want o' a volunteer?"

"I think," said Tom, "'ee can make a vacancy

for a likely lad o' your stamp. Maybe I'll enlist ye!"

I turned over on my side, and grunted, "Good night." I didn't sleep another wink. I had not come up here for nothing. The Lord had delivered Goliath into my hand.

I rose with the sun, and dressed myself in haste. While I was making my preparations, I saw Sailor Tom looking at me with one eye.

"I'm off," I said—"want to travel before the sun gets hot."

"I see," said Tom, "as the blind man said who couldn't see at all. Then ye won't 'ave breakfast?"

"No; but many thanks for all your kindness. By-the-by, which is the track to the Dead Horse diggin's?"

"W'en ye get out o' the 'ome paddock you'll see a blasted red-gum; go up to it an' cross the road; then you'll come on a blazed track; follow that up, an' you'll strike Dead Horse in twenty-five miles. An' a word in ye'r ear! If you meet 'Thunder-an'-Lightnin'," tell 'im you're a friend o' mine, an' ye want to jine the troop. Say I recommend ye. Show 'im this." He took a copper token out of his

trousers' pocket, and handed it to me. I looked at it carefully, and saw a rude representation of forked lightning. "Show 'im this," he repeated, "an' tell 'im Sailor Tom enlisted ye. Jist whisper 'mum,' for that's the watchword. 'E'll know that I've enlisted ye. Now remember! 'mum's' the word."

"I'll remember. Good-bye, and thanks; I'll look him up." I lifted the latch and walked away, through the home paddock, up to the blasted tree, across the road, where I found the blazed track, and went joyfully on my way.

I was in no hurry, for I did not wish to arrive at the diggings till night was setting in. I had food in my swag when I wanted it. My pistols were in my belt. I felt right as a trivet, and was very confident. About dusk I came to Pepper Hill, a quarter of a mile from the track, and took a seat on the outcrop of a quartz reef that trended north and south. In the valley I could see tents, and smoke rising from the fires. I ate some bread and cake, and felt refreshed. Just then I heard the crack of a rifle away to the east. When you are after game, look for tracks; when after bushrangers, listen for the crack of firearms. I located

the exact spot where the shot came from, for I saw a puff of smoke rise behind a bush. I walked quickly down the hill in that direction. It was now dark.

I stole along on the soft, short grass till I judged I was near the spot. A low sobbing sound caught my ear. Instinctively I cocked one of my pistols, and held it in my right hand, creeping nearer and nearer, on hands and feet, till I came to something white, from which the sobbing came.

"I'm a friend," I said. "What's the matter?"

"I'm shot. Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do?" And a torrent of hysterical moaning followed from a woman's voice.

"My good woman," I said, "what has happened? Tell me quick!"

After a short time she was sufficiently calm to say, "My man has been murdered in that tent down there. When I was running away to give the alarm I was shot through the leg."

"Where is the man who did it?"

"In the tent. You can see it lighted up from where you stand."

"I will come back with help for you in a short time. Make no noise, as you value your life."

I went away like a shadow on tiptoe—a shade could not make less noise—and was soon at the back of the tent. It was lit by a candle. Through the thin canvas I could see a man with a fiddle on his knee. He took it up and tuned it. "Ha! ha!" he laughed, "I haven't played a tune for five years; but I'll have one now, in spite of all the fiends in hell." He struck a note or two, and glided into the tune of "Donnybrook Fair." "That's something like," he said. "Now for 'Rafferty's Wake!' That's the ticket! If I had a gallon of brandy I'd give him such a wake as has never been seen on Dead Horse, and make every man-jack on the place dance while I covered them with my pistol. Curse him! I wish I had never seen him. Only got ten ounces, and I was told he had made as much as five hundred." Then he played "Rafferty's Wake" again, but slid into the gloomy strains of "The Last Man."

He banged the fiddle on the table in a rage, then took it up and patted it. Putting it under his chin once more, he played the most mournful

air I ever heard, which made my flesh creep and my hair stand on end. Then he played "The Last Man."

"Curse the tune!" he roared. "If this is the last man I'm going to shoot I'll give him decent burial. Dead men tell no tales, and buried ones show no sign."

While all this was going on my eyes were not idle. On the rude bed lay the ghastly figure of a man—a hole in his forehead, and his face covered with blood. A rifle and a pistol lay on the table beside the murderer, also a chamois leather bag; and a small pile of gold dust was scattered near it. A brandy bottle and a pannikin, from which he had evidently been imbibing freely, stood at his elbow. I could easily have shot him, but that wasn't my game. "A living dog is better than a dead lion." I would watch and wait.

Then he went to a corner of the tent and took up a pick and shovel, with which he walked out and strode down the gulley, evidently with the intention of digging a hole into which to put the body. He hummed a lively tune for a few bars, dropping into a minor key, and ending with a

snatch from "The Last Man," as if he couldn't help it. This annoyed him. He swore a round oath, and clattered the pick and shovel together. I thought he was going to throw them down and come back, but he went on. I was after him like a weasel on a rabbit's track.

The moon came out grey and ghostly, so I easily kept him in sight. I felt sure he was "Thunder-and-Lightning." Something in his gait told me he was the man. He turned from side to side, apparently looking for a digger's trial-hole that would suit his purpose. When he had found one he threw down the pick and shovel, and peered into the excavation. It seemed to satisfy him, for he jumped into it and began to make it deeper.

I thought this was the proper moment to introduce myself, so I went softly to the edge of the hole and whispered, "Mum." He gave a start, for I had stolen so noiselessly he was taken aback, and stopped to look at me.

"Good evening, captain," I said ; "I come from Sailor Tom. He enlisted me in your troop if you'll have me. Here is the proof." Then I showed him the token I had received from Tom. He took it

and examined it by the pale light, then felt it with his forefinger.

Before I knew what he was doing he had pulled a pistol from his belt and pointed it at me. I felt Death's scythe swishing at my heart. My life wasn't worth a minute's purchase, but I did not flinch or wink an eye.

"Say the oath after me."

"All right, captain ; I'm ready."

Then he said, "I enlist as one of Captain 'Thunder-and-Lightning's' men."

I repeated, "I enlist as one of Captain 'Thunder-and-Lightning's' men."

"I swear I will obey him even to death."

"I swear I will obey him even to death."

"And shed my last drop of blood at his command."

"And shed my last drop of blood at his command."

"That's all," he said, lowering the pistol. "You are one of my men now, and as likely a young fellow as there is under my command. Give me your hand."

I put it out, and he gave it such a vice-like grip

I was very glad when he let go ; but I think I gave him as good a squeeze as I got.

“ You’re of the right sort ! ” he said, after he released me. “ Now, the first command I have to give you is to carry a dead man and bury him here. I always try the nerve of a new recruit.”

“ You’ll find, captain, that I have plenty of nerve, and more in the bank to draw from.”

“ Come along then, and go before me to that tent you see up there.”

I was actually driven, like a dumb beast, to the tent where the murdered man lay, and was told to go in.

“ Blast him ! ” said “ Thunder-and-Lightning.” “ Look at him ! See his ghastly eye ! Did you ever see a dead man stare like that ? I never felt like this before. I’m going mad ! No ! No ! it’s only my nerves that have given way.”

He seized the brandy bottle, poured about half a pint into the pannikin, and drank it to the last drop.

“ Ha ! that is better ! now I’ll play a tune. Shall it be ‘ Rafferty’s Wake ? ’ D—— it, man, why don’t you speak ? ”

"Yes," I said, "'Rafferty's Wake.' Ha! ha! well spoken, captain! You go before, and I'll follow with the body. We'll give him an illegant funeral."

"D—— you! You're a man after my own heart. You've got the nerve of twenty men! Just like me."

The brandy was working. He strutted about with the fiddle, and ran the bow up and down the strings. I followed him with the dead man in my arms, who was a little fellow and light.

The murdering ruffian marched before me playing "Rafferty's Wake," making the strings squeal and skirl, while he shouted, "That's something like! go it!" He arrived at the brink of the intended grave, and I was just behind him, when I gave a sudden lunge and struck him on the back with the dead man, which sent him sprawling, head foremost, into the hole. The murdered digger seemed to clutch him round the neck, and fell in with him. I sprang on top of them in a moment.

I forced "Thunder-and-Lightning's" right hand behind his back and held it there, while I slipped a pair of handcuffs out of my pocket and secured it;

then I wrenched the left hand in the same manner and handcuffed it.

I was so elated I could not contain myself any longer. I shouted "hurrah," and laughed loud and long. I suppose my nerves had been strung to such a pitch I had to let them down a little.

"Thunder-and-Lightning" lay quite still. At first I thought he was dead, as he had fallen upon his head. Perhaps his skull was broken ; but, as I never knew an Irishman to be killed by a fall on his head, I soon felt pretty easy in my mind that he was all right. Hard knocks with shillelahs, for thousands of years, have developed a thickening of the bone ; or is it a survival of the fittest ?

I slipped his pistols into my belt, then coo-ed for ten minutes, and fired a shot. To my great delight I heard a cautious, "What's the matter ? Where are you ? "

"I'm here ! I want help !" I shouted. Three men and six dogs soon made their appearance.

"Wha may you be, my fine fellow, an' what's the maiter ? " said an old man, who was holding a

bull-dog by a chain, and saying to him, “ Doun, Nero, doun ! ”

I told them in few words that the digger who had lived up the hill had been murdered, that his wife had been shot in the leg, that she was lying a short distance beyond, and that I had captured the murderer.

“ Jist let ma dong Nero hand 'im by the cauf o's leg, an' he winna get awa,” said the old man.

“ Poor Tom, and poor Lizzie,” said the men, who were decent fellows, and very sympathetic. Two of them went away to attend to the woman ; one of them stayed with me. In a short time Lizzie was carried to a tent, and given into the care of some women. The police were informed of what had taken place, and two of them came. We marched the murderer to the lock-up, then I called for a lantern, and flashed it in his face. He was “ Thunder-and-Lightning ” ; no mistake about that —broken nose, black eyes, and scar.

There is not much more to tell. I took charge of the scoundrel, and hardly lost sight of him, till he was safely lodged in Her Majesty's gaol in

Melbourne. He was tried, found guilty of murder, and hanged by the neck till he was dead. His Excellency the Governor thanked me warmly, and a large money reward with immediate promotion came very opportunely.

THE END

THE
KIDNAPPED SQUATTER

And Other Australian Tales.

BY ANDREW ROBERTSON.

PRESS NOTICES.

Academy, February 6th, 1892.

“Mr. Robertson, who publishes the volume containing ‘The Kidnapped Squatter and other Australian Tales’—which by the way are not exclusively Australian—is neither a Stevenson nor a Haggard, but he has an eye to character, and he can tell an incident well. The best story in his collection is also the longest—that in which Jack Reevely discovers his mysterious uncle, and thereby attains wealth and happiness. There are several good characters in this story, notably the old woman, Mrs. McWhae, and the detective, McWillie. Altogether, this is as pleasant and original a volume of short stories as has been printed for a very long time.”

THE KIDNAPPED SQUATTER.

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THE KIDNAPPED SQUATTER.

Press Notices—*continued.*

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